

Engage For Change: The Role of Public Engagement In Climate Change Policy

The results of research
undertaken for the Sustainable
Development Commission

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Contents

• Research Overview	3
• Acknowledgements	7
• Project 1: Engagement and the Policy Making Process	8
◦ Introduction and research methodology	
◦ How is policy made? When is public debate more than hot air?	
◦ What does all this mean? Public engagement and policymaking	
• Project 2: Engagement and the Civil Service	26
◦ Introduction and research methodology	
◦ The Civil Service and engagement: Research findings	
◦ What does this all mean? Public engagement and institutional culture	
• Putting the Pieces Together: Climate Change and Public Engagement	55
• Annex A How has public engagement been used? Six case studies	
• Annex B Understanding Institutional Capacity: the Role of culture	
• Annex C The GRIPS model	
• Annex D Engagement and the Civil Service: Question Schedule	
• Annex E Engagement and the Civil Service: Interviewees	
• Bibliography	
• Weblinks	

Research Overview

In recent years the British Government has stated explicitly its determination that citizens should contribute to the policy making process within all levels of government. From the recent local government White Paper “Building Strong and Prosperous Communities” which called for more responsive public services, to central government consultations on everything from party funding to stem cell research, and the European Commission involving citizens in planning a new vision for Europe – it is clear that the potential of public engagement has captured the imagination of policy makers and politicians alike. This commitment to involving the public in policy making is confirmed in the recent Government 2007 Policy Review Report¹. The report states that government must take steps to:

- empower citizens to shape their lives and services
- ensure that providers are more responsive to users’ needs; [and]
- create more effective ways for users to express their views (‘user voice’) and have them acted upon

Building on Progress, Strategy Unit, 2007²

In a similar vein, the 2007 Lyons Inquiry into the future of local government finance emphasised the role of the public in shaping local policy and services, stating that:

“Local government’s ability to engage local people lies at the heart of its place shaping role. If local government is to act in the interests of its community, influence its partners and ensure it tailors its work to the most important local priorities, it needs to make a step-change in the quality of its engagement work.”

Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government, Lyons Inquiry³

Recent years have also seen public engagement on national policy issues increase dramatically, with the 2003 “GM Nation” involving 40,000 people across the UK in over 200 community events, and the recent “Health” and “Pensions” debates both directly involving several thousand members of the public. In local government too, efforts have been made across a number of services to engage with people effectively. All local authorities are now obliged to consult residents much more than previously through mechanisms such as Best Value Performance Indicator surveys. Similarly, initiatives such as the New Deal for Communities have consciously sought

¹ Strategy Unit (2007) *Building on Progress: Public services, HM Government Policy Review*. London: Cabinet Office

² Strategy Unit (2007) p34

³ Lyon’s Inquiry into Local Government (2007) *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government*. London: The Stationery Office, p19

to empower and involve local communities. Other government agencies are also trying to build public engagement directly into policy shaping. An example of this is that, within healthcare, "Public" and "Patient" Forums have been set up to encourage dialogue between users and healthcare providers.

If, as these proposals suggest, public engagement activities are to be built into the way in which policy is created, determined and implemented, then this will fundamentally alter the way in which government operates. For, whilst the provision of statutory requirements to consult for public institutions has been a consistent factor of policy making in Britain for decades, these documents illustrate the shift by public agencies in recent years away from seeking to consult the public on policy decisions towards more collaborative and deliberative ways of directly including the public in shaping policy. This reflects the belief in the capacity of public engagement in policy making to do two things. Firstly, it offers a way of finding and creating knowledge of how any proposal will influence society by opening channels of communication between the policymakers and the individuals and communities they seek to serve. Secondly, public engagement is also seen as a way of improving the outcomes of policy making because it offers a way of encouraging ownership of policy by citizens and institutions. This in turn can ensure that policies are sustainable and able to deliver their outcomes because they have widespread support amongst the society they seek to affect.

"We need to be bolder and more imaginative, finding better ways of creating real dialogue and involving people in the decisions that change their lives. Innovative methods of public involvement will play a vital role in making this happen."

Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Health, 2005⁴

However, the intent to find new ways to involve the public in shaping policy is clear, but what this means in practise is still very much open to question. The formal provision of opportunities for the public to have an input into policymaking processes is only the first step in creating a more constructive relationship between citizens and government. It is also a statement of intent which sits at odds with the evidence of how the public view their relationship with the public realm. For citizens to participate in shaping policy in the way the Government intends they need to feel engagement is a valuable and productive use of their time. Yet this concern to build engagement with the public into policymaking takes place in a context in Britain where public participation in the public realm is at an all time low.

The difficulties are reflected not just in falling turnout and voter participation in local and national political institutions but also in the way in which "politics" itself has become a minority pursuit for many Britons. The Electoral Commission Audit of Political Engagement 2007 showed that just 54 per cent of the British public are interested in politics, with less than half of people feeling knowledgeable about politics or the role of MPs, and only 33 per cent agreeing that 'When people like me get involved in politics they can really change the way the country is run'. As

⁴ Opinion Leader Research (2005) *Britain Speaks: Effective public engagement and better decision-making*. London: OLR

Coleman and Götze comment: “most developed democracies are experiencing a collapse of confidence in traditional models of democratic governance.”⁵

In a democracy, the participation of a broad cross section of the public in the policy making process is vital to uphold the validity of decisions made. Thus, consequently its absence limits the capacity of Government to act because it seeks to operate in a society that neither trusts its actions nor understands the actual processes of governance. However, for today’s policy makers reconnecting the public to the public realm is not only about improving the legitimacy of the activities of Government. The need for forums in which the public can come together to make collective decisions is vital given the role that such collaboration will play in enabling society to tackle the future policy challenges it faces. Be it on climate change, persistent inequality and poverty or terrorism, only as individuals and communities working together will Britain be able to resolve these problems in a way which benefits all citizens.

Such collaboration can only be created and sustained through forums in which citizens can come together to decide how to act and how best to use the limited resources at their disposal. Getting public engagement in policy making right is not simply a problem for policy makers in ensuring support for the decisions they make. It challenges the very capacity of a society to act to address the problems that will affect all the lives of every citizen and those of future generations. Thus, improving the way in which Government interacts with the public matters for both the condition of the UK democracy and the capacity of Government to secure its policy objectives.

It is within this context that the research presented in this report has taken place. Both of the projects described here were focused on questions generated by the government’s stated intent of building a new relationship with the public in policy making. Reflecting the concerns of the Sustainable Development Commission, each of these papers looks at the ramifications of this evolving relationship could be on the capacity of the Government to tackle climate change.

The first paper, **Engagement and the Policy Making Process**, looks at the lessons that can be learned from how the public have been involved so far in shaping policy either through formal or informal methods of public engagement. With the range of engagement activities now being undertaken, this paper looks critically at whether public engagement has made any difference to the quality of policy making. The first paper then offers an analysis of how and when public engagement can lead to public influence over policy, and what lessons this offers those who seek to involve the public in addressing the issue of climate change.

The second paper, **Engagement and the Civil Service**, addresses the willingness of those working in local and national government to engage with the public.

⁵ Coleman, S and Götze, J (2001) *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation*. London: Hansard Society

Providing citizens with the opportunity to engage with the policy making process does not guarantee that their participation will actually influence policy. The success – or otherwise – of the government’s commitment to increase public engagement depends upon the will and ability of policy makers to make constructive use of engagement activities in their work on planning, producing and delivering policy. This is now widely acknowledged within wider public engagement discourses, which are moving away from a focus on the technicalities of engagement – which methods work best and when – to paying more attention to how institutional culture and capacity affect the ability of public engagement to succeed instead⁶. The second paper seeks to understand how those in government perceive the role of public participation in their work and the implications of this for whether public engagement processes can be used to open up political spaces or develop policies that provoke radical action on climate change.

Readers of this report should note that neither project is designed to provide a toolkit on engagement processes⁷ but instead to help identify how and when public engagement can be built into practical policy making within the government. To address these questions both these projects take a deliberately broad interpretation of the concept of public engagement, seeking to understand how the myriad ways in which the general public can contribute to the formation of policy has influenced outcomes and the working practices of government. As a consequence they look at a range of processes termed as public engagement which are deliberately different from stakeholder engagement. Traditionally a stakeholder could be defined as anyone who can affect or be affected by an issue, but there is the further complication of relative importance. Who is a main or key stakeholder; where do members of the public become stakeholders; are they the same thing? Although these are important questions, this paper does not seek to answer them. However, whilst engagement with “stakeholders” has long been a large and distinct part of the UK policy making process, it is the impact of developing new ways of engaging with the wider public which concerns this research.

Given their different concerns, each of the papers presented can be read as stand alone research and the report is therefore structured to enable the reader to approach each topic separately. However, it is clear that the overlaps in the outcomes they generate call for a joined up response. For this reason the final section of this report offers a joint conclusion about what the implications are for those concerned with how public engagement can influence the debate on climate change. Given the reality of the policy making process at present within Britain, it sets out a series of recommendations for the Sustainable Development Commission in taking forward its work programme on engagement.

⁶ Gavelin, K and Wilson, R with Doubleday, R (2007) *Democratic Technologies: final report of the Nanotechnology Engagement Group (NEG)*. London: Involve; Involve, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), and Ipsos Mori (2006) *User Empowerment in Local Service Delivery*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)

⁷ Appendix A details the GRIPS approach to understanding and planning effective engagement processes which has influenced this report. Useful guides to understanding public engagement practice can be found at www.peopleandparticipation.net, <http://togetherwecan.direct.gov.uk> and www.iap2.org

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Project 1: Engagement and Policy Making

1. Introduction

To truly gauge the role of public engagement in successful policy making it is not enough just to consider engagement processes as one off projects in isolation, distinct from the policy area or social or economic circumstances in which they happen. Instead, understanding how and why public engagement has influenced policy requires looking a range of factors which include not only the method of engagement, but also the context in which policy is created and the political and institutional thinking behind it. To identify these factors therefore requires an approach which goes beyond looking at examples of processes in isolation and is instead able to contextualise these within the policy making process in the real world. The main aims of this paper **Engagement and the Policy Making Process** are:

- To develop a better understanding of the role engagement plays in generating successful (sustainable) policies.
- To identify how and where engagement can be most effective in government policy-making, taking the area of climate change as a specific focus.
- To compare the challenge of strategic policy making engagement with the experiences of local level engagement.

2. Research Methodology

Identifying the range of actors who seek to influence policy, the research focuses on six case studies which reflect both positive and negative public involvement in policy making. Supplementing this primary analysis, the research also draws on secondary examples, a series of interviews with key commentators in this field and a literature and media review. The differing sources of data sought in producing this research can be identified as follows:

- *Literature review*: covering the topics of public engagement, sustainable development and public policy, and climate change engagement initiatives.
- *Case studies*: encompassing a number of policy areas and focusing on various levels of the policy making process. Six case studies are analysed in detail, with additional others being drawn upon where particular points of interest or importance are found. The research team have drawn upon official reports, evaluation papers, contextual papers, anecdotal evidence and policy documents related to each main case study.
- *Interviews*: with some key commentators. These were informal in nature and also anonymous so that interviewees could potentially speak more freely. The

interviews carried out for the parallel paper **Engagement and the Civil Service** have also been drawn upon in this paper where relevant insights emerge.

- *Discussion workshop*: held with key stakeholders in the sustainable development and public engagement field to share initial research outcomes.

Rather than focus solely on attempts to engage the public in discussions around the issue of sustainable development *per se*, the case studies chosen were deliberately drawn from a wide range of policy areas, including pensions, healthcare, planning and regeneration and to reflect attempts to engage with the public at different points in the policy making process. Each case study has been chosen because it offers insights into balancing the ability of public engagement to improve policy making with the range of other factors which also determine the outcomes of the policy making process. A detailed examination of each of the case studies is provided in Annex A and the method used to examine them (the GRIPS model) is set out in Annex B. The case studies are as follows:

POLICY DIRECTION: Make Poverty History

GM Nation

POLICY DECISION: National Pensions Debate

Tomlinson Inquiry on Education/A-level policy

POLICY DELIVERY: Local Healthcare Reorganisation

New Islington Millennium Community

The analysis presented in this paper places the lessons from these case studies within the wider context of public policy development and engagement activities within contemporary Britain. The report is structured in the following way. The following section will set out a brief overview of the contemporary policy making process and the different actors who seek to influence public policy. This serves to identify the differing stages of the policy making process during which public engagement can occur. Section 3 will then present the insights into public engagement this research has uncovered. In doing so it asks what the lessons from these experiences are for those seeking to use public engagement activities to improve or influence policy designed to tackle climate change. As the paper will discuss, many of the issues these examples raise relate to the culture of governance – the subject of the parallel paper on **Engagement and the Civil Service**. Therefore the conclusion of this report draws on the learning developed in both research projects to ask how it can be applied to the work of the Sustainable Development Commission in promoting policies to tackle climate change.

3. How is policy made? When is public debate more than hot air?

“Policy does not happen in isolation. It is not formulated and implemented solely by policy makers in government offices. A range of institutions, such as markets or the legal system, and organisations such as NGOs or bureaucracies, mediate a messy relationship between policy and people’s livelihoods. This is the interface where policy and people meet.”

Tools for Sustainable Livelihoods: Policy Analysis, 2001⁸

As the above quote reflects, it is not possible to segregate public engagement processes from the wider context of public policymaking. Therefore understanding how public engagement has influenced policy requires fitting it into this context. To assist in this, this section of **Engagement and the Policy Making Process** considers the policy making process, setting out three distinct stages to policy making. These are as follows:

A. Policy direction and strategy

This describes the agenda setting, strategy or broad policy discussions which take place to determine government-wide directions. In this phase of the process, issues become part of the public agenda when there is a perception that a problem must be solved, an issue resolved, or an opportunity realized. This perception is manifested through discussion and debate within the public realm. The public realm is the domain in which private individuals come together as a public body. This can be within government forums such as within departments or between them or it can be through external public debate in political, media, on-line or academic environments or the interaction between government and external audiences.

Such discussions do not necessarily lead to the development of actual policy responses to the issue raised. This reflects the difference between the creation of a political space for discussion of a policy area and the actual setting of policy agenda or direction. For the purposes of this project political space is considered to refer to any public debate in which government representatives, either political or administrative, are called to interact with an issue and respond on behalf of government. Political space can lead to policy proposals or it may cause government to defend the status quo, reflecting how often agendas for public policy can be contested by differing actors in the policymaking process. Political space activity can be said to become part of the policy direction stage of the policy making process when it leads to actual action.

⁸ Pasteur, K (2001) *Tools for Sustainable Livelihoods: policy analysis*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

A campaign on unhearing ears

Fathers 4 Justice is a campaigning group set up in 2002 with the express aim of bringing about a change in family law, to remove what they believe is a bias towards mothers in child contact and custody cases. Using dramatic high profile stunts – flour bombing Prime Minister Tony Blair, scaling public buildings dressed as comic book heroes, congregating on the Lord Chancellor’s office dressed in Father Christmas costumes – the group quickly hit newspaper headlines. Despite this success in creating a political space within the public realm for the discussion of the concerns of the campaign, this did not translate into influence over the policy direction or decisions of the Government regarding child custody. One small adjustment to the Children Act 1989, carried in the Children and Adopted Act 2006, boosted the courts’ powers to *enforce* contact orders for non-resident parents, but no real change has been made to the imbalance of rights perceived by Fathers 4 Justice. Furthermore, while political space was opened in which the debate took place, the actions of the group instead appeared to have prompted the government to defend their position, and indefinitely postpone any further examination of the issue.

B. Policy decisions

This is the point in the production of policy when policy proposals are determined. This can either be for a particular sector, such as the economy, or issue-area, such as carbon trading. This stage of the policy process is differentiated from policy direction because it is the point at which concrete ideas for action are considered as opposed to general calls for action. As a result this is often the point at which formal public engagement activities are involved, often through statutory or government instigated consultations with those affected. It is also the stage at which the role of political and/or government actors comes to the fore. They are often charged with putting forward policy proposals for consultation, or responding to them before deciding whether the policy should be implemented after considering public responses.

Going nuclear?

The 2003 Energy White Paper the Government stated that “*before any decision to proceed with the building of new nuclear power stations, there will need to be the fullest public consultation*”. However, on 15th February 2007 Mr. Justice Sullivan found that the Government had failed in this promise in the recent Energy Review. This ruling was entirely concerned with the “*seriously flawed*” public consultation. Greenpeace, who instigated the High Court Case, welcomed the ruling and the promise of a new consultation process. However, Tony Blair stated that whilst the ruling would change the consultation process, “this won’t affect the policy at all”. This demonstrates how tensions clearly remain between what the public and pressure groups seek to gain from formal consultation, and how the government and civil service believe the public should be involved in the policy decision making process.

Sources: www.greenpeace.org.uk/media/press-releases/governments-nuclear-plans-declared-unlawful-by-high-court; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6364281.stm; Department for Trade and Industry (2003) *Energy White Paper: Our energy future – creating a low-carbon economy*. London: TSO

C. Policy implementation

This is considered the final aspect of the policy making process because it refers to the execution of policy decisions on the ground. It is also often the most visible aspect of the policy making process for the public as those affected by policy respond to it becoming operational. However, in reality this can often be the point at which new policy priorities are determined and the policy making process starts again. This is because implementation of policy often reveals issues or concerns that were not obvious during the planning process. Therefore the policy implementation stage of the policy process can often be defined by adaptations in policy to take account of unforeseen circumstances.

Learning from Individual Learning Accounts

Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) were introduced by the Learning and Skills Act 2000, and closed just 16 months later in November 2001. The scheme aimed to iron out educational inequalities by reducing the financial barriers that prevent some groups in society from accessing education. However, the market research that took place before the introduction of the scheme had not indicated that the uptake would be so high. The design of the ILA policy did not allow for sufficient changes to take place once the scheme was in place, and problems continued for several months before the eventual closure of the scheme. Recommendations for future learning from the Education and Skills Select Committee were primarily concerned with how policy is developed. These included the need for government departments to seek advice from as wide a range of sources as possible, from other departments and outside organisations and from past experiences.

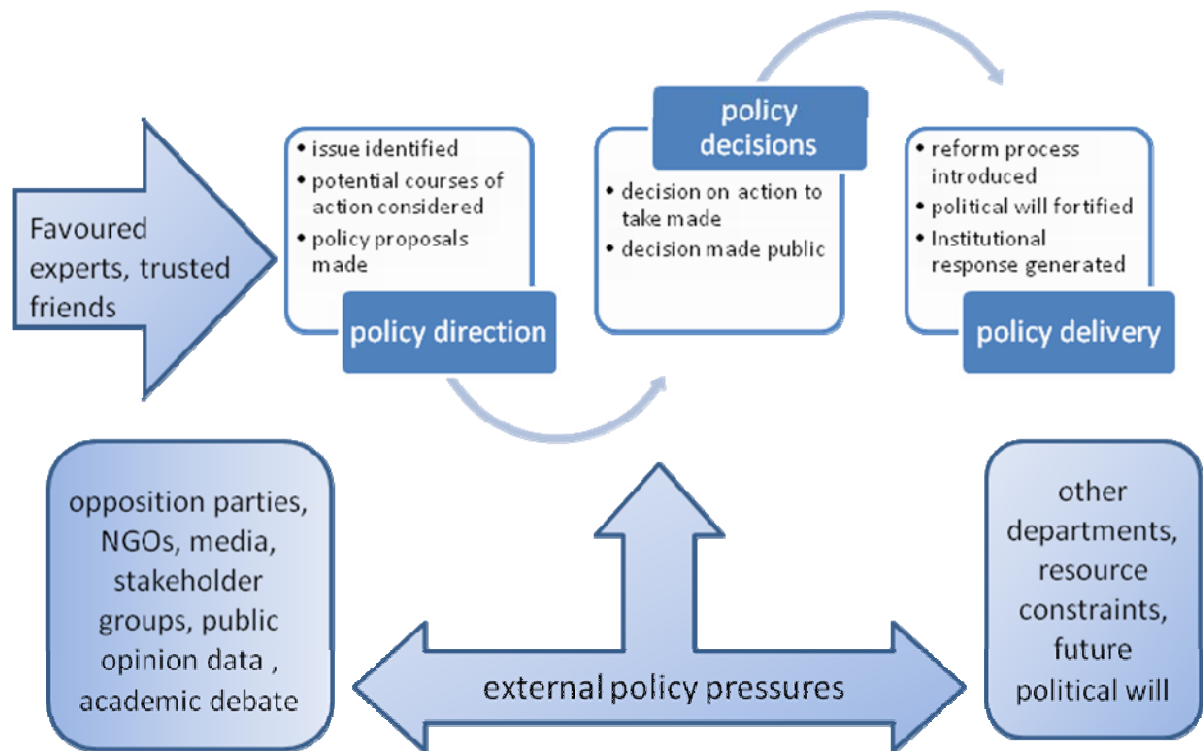
Source: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmeduski/561/56102.htm

Who makes policy? The actors of the public realm

Dividing the policy making process into these three stages helps to frame an analysis of how public engagement at each point has influenced outcomes. Yet at each stage it is also clear other constraints also act to frame the policies taken forward. Thus, understanding how public engagement in policy making can exert influence in this process requires not just recognising the different stages but also how contextual factors determine the input of the public. This is because policy making in the real world is not simply based on what can be “rationally” termed the best course of action or a process of incremental internally determined updating of existing policy. Instead it is often the result of a myriad of both formal evidence of best practise and the political, social and economic context in which a proposal is put forward.

When these are considered it becomes clear that not all external actors are equally able to influence decision makers and often some actors are better at getting proposals taken up or being heard by Government than others. This can be for a range of reasons – they could be considered trustworthy by policy makers, or because they have the ability to define a “political space” as described above. This is what can be termed an “inner circle” view of how policy is made, whereby an “inner circle” of individuals or organisations are seen to have more influence than other actors in determining policy outcomes. Those outside this “inner circle” are able to influence policy but to a lesser degree or through actions requiring greater effort and resources. The diagram below reflects the complexity of understanding how policy is made, and so the context in which public engagement seeks to act, in the real world.

Inner circle policy



Understanding the policy making process therefore requires an appreciation of the different stages of policy making, the range of individuals and groups who seek to participate and their capacity to influence outcomes, and the institutional rules and power relationships which frame these two factors. It is this “inner circle” model which this paper uses in its analysis of the use of public engagement in the policy making process.

Where do the public fit in policy making? Using public engagement activities to inform the policy making process

In each of these formal models of policy making public engagement is very much limited to responding to the policies put forward rather than being part of the process of policy making itself. This reflects a traditional viewpoint that “experts” within government are the best placed individuals to analyse and advise politicians on what policies can be implemented. Both the “muddling through” and “inner circle” models take account of public opinion as a force which can influence calculations of which policies can be put forward. Thus, politicians and administrations will decide policy, announce their decisions and then defend those

using calculations of either what will and will not be popular and so sustainable with the voting public.

The Countryside Alliance, Vote OK and the hunting ban

The UK Government's decision to ban fox hunting in 2004 inspired a vocal opposition movement with deep roots in the British countryside. Two key players in the campaign, the Countryside Alliance and Vote OK, have persistently lobbied government to repeal the ban, which they see as a "failure in the democratic process" allowing Government to pass legislation that they claim "flies in the face of evidence, integrity and tolerance". The call for a repeal of the hunting ban website is the fifth largest petition on the Number Ten petition, with 39904 signatures at the time of writing. The intervention of actors outside the "inner circle" in the shape of the commitment of the official opposition to repealing the ban has hardened the resolve of the Government to retain it and lessened the willingness of Government to engage with the Countryside Alliance. The hunting ban remains one of the most divisive issues in UK public debate.

In 1999 the Cabinet Office published guidelines regarding the future of the policy making process⁹. This document focused on how those within government should develop policy and the methods they should use. In doing so it set out a "rational-choice" approach to policy making, highlighting the need for policymaking processes which were "forward looking" and "learning from the experience of other countries" but also primarily "evidence based". Here the role of the public was limited to commenting on proposals developed within government; whilst the intention was to create "inclusive" policies this meant "consulting those responsible for implementation and those affected by the policy; carrying out an impact assessment" rather than working directly with the public in designing, developing and implementing policy.

This guideline for how policy should be made therefore stands in contrast to the stated intent of the Government - discussed in the overview to this report - to open up policy making to a more direct influence not only from stakeholders but also from citizens and the general public themselves. The interest discussed in the overview opens up the potential for opportunities, at each stage of policy making, to be created for the public to have much more influence on the outcomes. However, as this discussion reflects, this desire for greater public engagement takes place against the institutional backdrop of the "inner circle" model of making policy. As a result any opportunities for public engagement in policy, at any point in its production, must be viewed within this context. In these circumstances the evidence of how actual public involvement, as distinct from other influences, has actually influenced policy outcomes is mixed. This means that those seeking to influence government policy need to know both how policy is made, what role public engagement can play in, or on, "the inner circle" and who and what else can contribute to securing policy outcomes. The following sections examine what the evidence gathered in this

⁹ Cabinet Office (1999b) *Professional Policy Making for the Twenty First Century*. London: Cabinet Office

research demonstrates about attempts to involve the public in policy making, and asks where, how and why the public's input influenced the policy outcomes.

4: Public engagement and policy-making

This research process has revealed public engagement in an issue can help create policy outcomes, but in itself it is not a winning argument for change and in some cases may have led to unwanted or unintended outcomes for policy makers. In the examples drawn on in this research it is clear that other actors within the “inner circle” model of policy making, be they the press or politicians, are influential in determining actual policy outcomes. This illustrates the need to view public engagement not as a distinct method for making policy, but instead to ask how it can be used to effect outcomes within the policy making process as a whole. With this in mind, this discussion draws together the lessons from the examples given in this paper as to how, when and why public engagement can contribute to the policy making process.

Mobilising the masses matters

This research shows mass engagement of the public in a policy area can create political space and policy pressure. As the example of Make Poverty History reflects, finding ways to engage large numbers of people, even if this requires a long period of time, can change the terms of public debate and ultimately policy. So too, as the example of the Tomlinson Inquiry reveals, the absence of public engagement can make it easier for political backtracking to occur. Yet large scale involvement in a policy area does not guarantee that policy change will follow, as Fathers 4 Justice and Road Pricing reflect. These examples show how engagement in policy which is organised by those seen to be outside the “inner circle” can sometimes lead to a hardening of policy outcomes rather than change. Furthermore, **Engagement and the Civil Service** illustrates how policy makers often contest the outputs of public engagement when it appears to contradict their professional viewpoint.

A road to nowhere?

A recent Number Ten petition set up by external protestors to oppose mooted road pricing reform has caused enormous set backs to the government’s plans to debate and consult on policy direction for road pricing in the UK, according to an interviewee speaking to Involve recently. This interviewee observed that “*the thing is a good idea but the government are now going to be very scared of it*”, identifying the danger of failing to engage the public at the very outset of policy review.

Although the debate on road pricing had not officially begun, rumours of a change in policy prompted interested parties to set up the online petition, opposing the notion of road pricing and effectively pre-empting any public engagement strategies the government intended to implement. This petition demonstrates that when public opinion is mobilised in an organised manner government policy can be rejected before it has even been formulated.

Moreover, mass involvement is not always desirable or necessary in a public engagement process. There are numerous ways of engaging the public in policy, and not all of them benefit the policy process by including large numbers of people. Rather, many valuable engagement methods, such as citizens' juries or focus groups, rely on in-depth deliberations with small groups of people. Whilst such methods are sometimes scaled up or reproduced to create a statistically significant body of evidence, there are many occasions when this is not deemed necessary and a small-scale engagement activity is valued in its own right. This shows the importance of scaling the level of public engagement required to the policy debate in question.

Despite this, however, it is clear that engagement of large numbers of people in a policy issue can provide "ammunition" for action, in particular when a policy is contested and relies on the support of the wider public.

Clarity, honesty and continuity are key

As all the examples in this paper have described, at any stage in the policy making procedure a well planned and honest process of engagement can add value to the policy making process. In this context honesty refers to effort made to ensure all participants understand the issues at stake and their ability to influence outcomes. Whilst the Pensions Debate, the New Islington Millennium Community or CoRWM¹⁰ used very different processes, each of these examples shows that clarity of vision and purpose is vital in creating shared expectations and successful outcomes. Conversely, as the GM Nation example illustrates how a lack of clarity on purpose can have extremely counterproductive knock-on effects. This point reflects how whilst the focus of this paper has been the policymaking process itself, the benefits of good public engagement accrue only when validity is two way; the public need to feel that the process in which they are involved is itself valid, whilst the government needs to demonstrate the degree of validity it places on the opinions of the public.

Thus, there are two clear rules for when NOT to engage: engagement is futile when policy outcomes have already been determined or if there is a lack of commitment to using the potential outcomes that public debate may put forward. Indeed, the on-going difficulties facing the reorganisation of healthcare services illustrate how doing either of those can be perceived as a lack of honesty and can only enhance public mistrust of policy makers.

Context, timing and resources must be taken into account

All the examples in this paper, whether broadly successful or not, also illustrate the importance of being conscious of the wider policy context when planning

¹⁰ Committee of Radio Active Waste Management stakeholder dialogue process on options for management of nuclear waste

engagement activities. This means ensuring a public engagement initiative is timed to fit with the decision making process, with the production of other policy evidence, and, if possible, with any related activities or debates taking place. There needs to be commitment to this principle right from the start, especially for large scale engagement processes, which are resource and time intensive. Furthermore, engagement activities can be undermined if they are solely focused on process and so inadvertently disregard the wider context. For example, it is clear the electoral context in which the Tomlinson Inquiry into A level reform took place meant that the space for new policy ideas on secondary education to be proposed, supported and enacted was small. In contrast in the case of the GM Nation debate, a lack of planning meant that the results of important scientific studies were not able to feed into the discussion, which in turn affected the debate's ability to be taken seriously by decision makers and scientists. Similarly, the mismatch between the timing of the YHCYS¹¹ events and the reorganisation of local healthcare services undermined the ability of the former to influence how the latter was handled. Conversely, in the case of Make Poverty History the time allowed to building up initially public consciousness, support and then action for the campaign was vital to its success. This reflects how careful planning of the lead in and follow up processes can be as vital as planning the engagement activity itself.

Think local, but do not assume it is better

The case studies used in this research show local ownership makes public engagement work, whether this is in the context of a local or national process of involvement. Local memory, historical factors, previous engagement exercises and other social factors are generally unique to each area and so will affect the outcome of each process to different degrees. The case studies also illustrate the simple truth that it is often easier for participants to see the value of taking part in policy at a local level due to the immediacy of the impact to the world around them. Thus, local ownership of a process through a flexible engagement exercise with individually tailored or universally applicable components will contribute to the overall success of any engagement process, be it local or national. For example, taking this on board and adapting the process to it was used to particularly successful effect in the planning of the National Pensions debate.

The analysis in **Engagement and the Civil Service** also demonstrates that local government tends to be more receptive to public involvement and see more potential value in it. Yet this analysis offers a caution in presuming how these benefits occur as it is not possible within the scope of either research papers to determine the causes. It is likely that these benefits occur because people working in local government are at the front line of policy delivery and therefore necessarily have to stay closely in touch with local needs. Yet it may also be that, for local government workers, the general public are seen as a key stakeholder in policy, and so the culture of local government is more attuned to seeing how the public and policy can be fitted together.

¹¹ Your Health, Your Care, Your Say consultation on healthcare priorities

Indeed, the examples in this paper reflect how it is not simple to scale up an effective local engagement process to a regional or national level. For example, the ethos of Urban Splash working on the New Islington Millennium Community towards engaging with local people is something easily taken to a wider level, but the process of engaging door to door with all residents would be difficult without a large commitment of time and resources. Furthermore, because local variables can affect the outcomes of any engagement process, it is important to remember that specific local processes such as the New Islington Millennium Community can offer lessons, but they should not be seen as process blueprints. Put simply, what works in one area may not work in another; due to factors such as the demography of the population, the history of the issue in question, and the relationships between the authority and the local population. The degree of variation between different locations makes it impossible to scale up even the best local level engagement process to national level and be assured of a similar outcome. However, these examples do show developing a local focus to engagement and process is a potentially valuable route to take.

Finally, it is also important to remember that real engagement is more important than whether the engagement is “upstream” or local. As the example of Healthcare reorganisation shows, the government must join up processes in local and national government in order for engagement to influence policy and be taken seriously by policy makers. If national commitments are not fulfilled at a local level public mistrust and disconnection from political processes are likely to increase.

One model may not fit all

All the examples investigated in this research reflect how good engagement is often as much about context as the actual method used. This demonstrates the importance of taking each issue on a case-by-case basis and, most importantly, within its broader policy context. As **Engagement and the Civil Service** reflects, there is a danger that particular participation models become seen as synonymous with “public engagement”, at the expense of proper consideration about whether or not they are the best approach for the purpose. For instance, at present there are a number of large scale deliberative forums, similar to those used for the Pensions debate and the YHYCYS process, being planned or having recently happened within the UK government. However, simply replicating a process used with success in another policy area risks overlooking the reasons why that process was effective in the first place. For example, the success of the National Pensions Debate can be attributed to a number of factors beyond the choice of engagement method; such as the timing of the process, the evidence it was based on, the media coverage of the issue, and the particular policy makers and organisers involved. Similarly, the social marketing techniques used by Make Poverty History proved an effective way of capturing the attention of large numbers of people, but it is not clear that simply repeating these techniques to campaign against climate change will be as successful.

Live Earth

Live Earth is a worldwide, 24-hour concert series which will take place on 7 July 2007. The initiative will consist of nine concerts across seven continents, bringing together over two billion people to “trigger a global movement to solve the climate crisis”. There has so far been little media coverage of the project other than an initial press release pointing people towards the website. The lack of media coverage has been suggested by some to be a result of the lack of tangible benefits from initiative; i.e. no exciting story or clear paths of actions to follow from the event. There are also concerns that people are only attending because it’s a concert, rather than because they care about climate change.

Live Earth marks the beginning of a large, long-term campaign on climate action led by the Alliance for Climate Protection, The Climate Group and other organisations. These groups are taking a joined-up approach to engaging with governments, corporations and individuals on taking action to halt the climate crisis. Exact plans are being closely guarded, and the potential long-term impacts of the process remain unclear. It is too early at the time of writing to make any judgments on Live Earth’s ability to have an impact on either policy or public behaviour. However, unfavourable comparisons with Make Poverty History have already been drawn, with Live Earth being criticised for focusing too much on a single event and not doing enough to raise mass awareness about either the project or the cause.

The variety of methods by which the public were involved in policy making in each of the examples given in this paper shows the value in not taking a “one-model-fits-all” approach to public engagement. Instead, they make the case for questioning how and why engagement will add value to a policymaking process, looking then at whose engagement is sought and only once this is decided asking what method would best facilitate this outcome. Indeed, the examples show that where innovation in engagement activities has been encouraged it has been productive. For instance, both the Pensions Debate and Make Poverty History worked effectively with the media to generate mass awareness and support for their processes. CoRWM used an innovative technique called Deliberative Mapping to allow participants to deliberate on and assess complex policy options. Meanwhile, YHCYS the Pensions Debate and Sciencehorizons all used a combination of national deliberative events and smaller, self-run activities to allow as wide a range of voices as possible to be heard.

Stories and journeys pave the way

All of the examples given in this research reflect how the media and public debate about the topic played a critical part in the policy outcomes achieved. This shows how any attempt to engage the public occurs within a contemporary culture where the media and communications activities have a vital role in translating and conveying the “story” of a subject to the public. As one interviewee in **Engagement and the Civil Service** described that there is a “background noise” of debate, discussion and concern in wider society in which policy is made and through which it

will be interpreted. Engaging with the media and public debate is therefore not simply about setting out the reasons behind a policy, but also a way of actively offering the public a series of images and ideas with which to understand why the policy matters to them, and what role they can play in securing outcomes; put simply it is presenting the “story” behind the issue at hand. By engaging the public not only through formal processes and forums but also through media debate, both the National Pensions Debate and Make Poverty History were able to set the “story” about their subject which in turn helped the public understand why it was important for them to be involved, whether in the actual engagement activities or more generally in responding to the public debate on the issues in question.

This reflects how the media can be a powerful ally or a deadly foe in engaging the public. In both these instances effective media campaigns complemented the engagement activities to help direct interest in a policy area towards a particular outcome or process. A high profile story surrounding public involvement can also fortify or demolish potential policy outcomes, leaving policy vulnerable to being “tabloid dive-bombed”. In the case of the Tomlinson Inquiry, the media-coined term “A-level gold standard” told the “story” of the Inquiry’s policy proposals in a way in which the policy makers did not, which meant that the debate surrounding the proposals was shaped by the media, not the policy makers.

Whether working with the media or in seeking to tell the story about the policy in question, it is important to speak the language of the public rather than the policy professional. The GM nation debate suffered for speaking the language of those already well versed in the debate, alienating many potential participants rather than engaging them in the subject. Clear and accessible language is vital in order to enable low barriers to entry for the public to a policy making process. This in turn opens up the possibility of engaging a larger audience than specialist debate alone can offer.

It is also important to recognise the need for time to be built into telling any “story”; that all audiences need to be taken on a “journey” rather than being expected to engage with a topic straight away. Participants need time to get to grips with a subject and develop their knowledge about often complicated issues be it the future demographics of the UK or the design of housing. However, the time required should not be overestimated. As the National Pensions Debate demonstrated, deliberative processes can help take participants on a journey and bring them up to speed on the main issues fairly quickly, even on complex topics. The GM Nation report also highlights this point, stating that *“whatever its other results, the debate demonstrated the power of people to engage in complex policy issues if they are given the opportunity”*¹². These examples highlight the importance of building communication and media activities into policy and engagement debates, alongside any actual engagement activity, rather than separating these elements out from each other.

¹² Heller, G (2003) *GM Nation? The findings of the public debate*. London: Department of Trade and Industry

Make the right use of people

Often a decision made quite early on in the policy making process as to how and whether “experts” or the public should be involved, especially where the topic is difficult or contentious. As the Tomlinson Inquiry shows, stakeholder engagement is often done as a mistaken proxy for talking to the public. The evidence in this paper shows how if public support for a contested policy is required, it is important to engage both stakeholders and citizens in the policy making process. The examples reflect how stakeholders can usefully be called upon as specialists in a subject area, but that they should not be considered spokespeople for the public. Often within an organisation or policy community, there will be differences between groups and between the leadership and members of such groups as to how they respond to policy. Whilst stakeholders can clearly be powerful advocates for a policy, they do not necessarily represent the views of their membership or the wider public.

Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM)

CoRWM was set up after three decades of failed attempts to find a solution to the long-term problem of radioactive waste management. The process consisted of three stages, with a consistent focus on stakeholder and public engagement throughout its activities. The first stage, *Preparation and Trialling*, involved working with specialists to draw up preliminary reports, and to design and trial the public and stakeholder engagement processes. The next stage, *Framing and Shortlisting*, involved a range of stakeholder and public engagement activities whereby the options for a waste management strategy were reviewed and shortlisted. In the final stage, *Option assessment*, a series of specialist panels reviewed the material and the outputs from the engagement activities, after which a set of recommendations for Government policy were produced. The recommendations were welcomed by the Government, which also praised as “groundbreaking” the open and transparent process by which they had been created. The Government has since committed to take forward the committee’s recommendation to explore options for geological disposal of radioactive waste.

The CoRWM case study shows how for some policy decisions, stakeholder or “expert” engagement is clearly more suited than a large or even small scale engagement process. Traditionally, stakeholder input has tended to be more centred on knowledge, interest and influence, whereas public input is generally more values-based. It is important to recognise this when involving either group, and to recognise the validity of both stakeholder and public input in their own right. The National Pensions Debate is an example of how public and stakeholder engagement can work in harmony and produce powerful results. The GM Nation debate shows what can happen when the boundaries between the two groups are not made clear or taken into account in a process of engagement.

Engagement and the Civil Service reflects how for many policymakers engaging with “experts” and stakeholders is an established and routine practise, which happens through both formal and informal channels. In contrast, engaging with the public is seen to require separate processes and discourses, making it a time consuming and potentially obstructive addition to the policy making process. Both reports reveal the validity of either approach or even doing both in different ways during a policy making process. The challenge facing policymakers is to recognise when and how both are to be used.

Making the right use of people is not only about how stakeholders are included in formal engagement activities. The examples also show how intervention from unexpected sources or individuals in a policy area can confound matters. The support by pop stars for the Make Poverty History campaign helped bring the issue of international development to public attention, but the support of Republican Senators for the same campaign changed the terms of the policy debate. It not only removed political opposition but also challenged presumptions that international development was a partisan subject for a “liberal elite” rather than a matter about which all citizens should be concerned. For the public this caught their attention and increased willingness to engage. This capacity to confound expectations can be planned for and used, as it can act as a powerful agent for change and can engender new levels of trust in a process. So too, using good communicators to help tell the story of a policy can be an effective driver for engagement. The role of Adair Turner in helping gather support for the Pensions Debate not just amongst stakeholders but also the public was arguably critical to its outcomes.

Political “buy-in” makes it policy

In a democracy, ultimately and rightly, the final say on policy direction resides with elected officials. Thus, critical to the success of any engagement process is the receptiveness of key decision-makers to the objectives and outcomes of a process and the policy proposals recommended. Any value to engaging the public can be rapidly be lost if those higher up the policy making chain are not ready to accept the outcomes. Furthermore, as the examples of Fathers 4 Justice and road pricing reflect, a lack of political “buy-in” either to an engagement process or indeed the topic can make public participation ultimately futile. These interventions and their genesis in organisations which are outside the “inner circle” of policy making, in contrast with Make Poverty History or government owned processes such as the National Pension Debate, also show that influence over decision makers and so policy making is not solely about the merits of a proposal but also how it is presented - and indeed who presents it.

Another important factor in ensuring political “buy-in” is to make sure that politicians and policy makers are in agreement about why the public are engaged in the first place, and what the process can realistically deliver. Without setting realistic expectations of what an engagement exercise will achieve, there is a danger that it is perceived to not be “delivering”. As **Engagement and the Civil Service** shows, getting decision makers to take part directly in engagement processes is vital to ensuring support for their outcomes. Indeed, the participation of many politicians in

the National Pensions Debate helped to ensure political commitment to its outcomes and support for the value of the process to government as a whole.

Yet clearly achieving political buy-in may also depend upon the social and political landscape at the time of engagement, as well as ministerial priorities and the willingness of those in charge of the engagement activity to lobby key decision makers. Engagement can offer “political capital” for tough decisions if they give the right result, but equally engagement activities can be seen obstructive if they do not produce the desired results; the contrast between support for the validity of the National Pensions Debate sharply contrasts with the furore over the Road Pricing petition. Moreover, currently the political focus is on engagement as a means of educating the public, not a way of involving them in shaping policy. As Make Poverty History shows perhaps one of the most politically powerful achievements for any social campaign or engagement activity is the development of a consensus around an issue that transcends party politics. This not only secures “political capital” or even “political space” but also policy outcomes.

The example of the Tomlinson Working Group also shows the folly of planning policy without regard to the political pressure decision makers will face or can exert. The shift in political landscape faced by those charged with defending the policy, without “political capital” to support it, made the policy proposals vulnerable to partisan attack. In contrast, the Turner Commission was timed to avoid such issues and survived political scepticism through using the level of public and stakeholder support it had generated through engaging with both. There is little doubt that, even if Gordon Brown’s apparent concerns over the Turner Report had been upheld, it would have been politically unwise for him to voice them in public following the degree of consensus reached by the National Pensions Debate.

This section of **Engagement and the Policy Making Process** has considered how different examples of public engagement activities have sought to influence policy. As the discussion reflects, there are clear overlaps between the issues this analysis raises and the outcomes of the research in **Engagement and the Civil Service**. Therefore, in using the analysis offered here to make recommendations for the future work programme of the Sustainable Development Commission this report offers a final overview which takes account of the outcomes in each paper.

Project 2. Engagement and the Civil Service

1. Introduction

In order to assist in understanding and improving the capacity of those in local and national government to engage effectively with the public, this research provides a snapshot study of attitudes to public engagement within government. These were carried out with the following aims:

- to better understand the factors which limit, and those which stimulate, the will and ability of policy makers to use engagement within their work
- to give a clear indication of the areas for further action, particularly in terms of the focus of our capacity building efforts

2. Research methodology

Analysing how institutional capacity and culture affect public engagement activities is complicated by an absence of research into how civil servants view the role of public participation in their work. Whereas there is a growing body of evidence as to the role that engagement activities can play in policy, or the attitudes of citizens towards engagement¹³, there have been only limited attempts to date to explore how civil servants are responding to these developments. There is a similar shortage of evidence of how the attitudes of civil servants and elected officials affect the use or outcomes of engagement activities in government. This paper **Engagement and the Civil Service** addresses this issue. In doing so it has drawn on the following range of resources:

- *Literature review*: covering the topics of public engagement, sustainable development and public policy, and climate change engagement initiatives.
- *In-depth interviews*: eighteen in-depth interviews were conducted with key individuals across local and national government who were in policy, communication and political roles¹⁴. The outcomes of these are the main focus of this project. In identifying interviewees and developing the research approach the research team have drawn upon official reports, evaluation papers, contextual papers, anecdotal evidence and policy documents.
- *Discussion workshop*: held with key stakeholders in the sustainable development and public engagement field to share initial research outcomes.

¹³ E.g. Mori/Scottish Executive (2005) *Public Attitudes to Participation*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

¹⁴ Annex E to this report sets out the full details of each interviewee

The report draws on a social psychological approach to understanding cultural and organizational change. The details of this paradigm and the framework it offers for investigating culture is set out in Annex B of this report including the details of the questions and interview techniques used to gather the data on which this research is based¹⁵. The following chapter details the outcome of the research, offering in-depth evidence of the barriers and enablers to engagement that exist within the cultural ethos of the Civil Service. Following on from this, Section 4 then considers the implications of these factors in putting into practice the intent discussed in the overview of this paper to develop public engagement in policy making. Finally, the conclusion of this report looks at how these and the conclusions of **Engagement and the Policy Making Process** can be applied to the work of the Sustainable Development Commission in promoting policies to tackle climate change.

¹⁵ Annex D to this report sets out the interview questions in full

3. *The Civil Service and Engagement: Research Findings*

This section of **Engagement and the Civil Service** explores the key themes that emerged from the interviews conducted for this research with regard to the attitudes of civil servants to public engagement and its role in policy making. Section 4 then considers the implications of these shared themes and reference points for those seeking to increase the participation of the public in policy making.

Just what is engagement for?

As demonstrated in the overview to this report, public engagement has become a central fixture of local and national policy making in recent years. Yet this research showed amongst participants who were drawn from a range of backgrounds within the civil service that there remains a sense of confusion within government about what the concept actually means, and why it is important. In unpicking this confusion it is helpful to refer to the McKinsey model of institutional effectiveness¹⁶. It is clear in many of the “hard” elements of the government’s operating processes that there is an agreement that public engagement is about giving members of the public opportunities to shape policy. This is shown in several recent policy documents:

“Effective consultation is a key part of the policy-making process. People’s views can help shape policy developments and set the agenda for better public services.”

Tony Blair, Code of Practice for Consultation, Cabinet Office, 2004¹⁷

“We want (...) for people to be given more control over their lives; consulted and involved in running services; informed about the quality of services in their area.”

Strong and prosperous communities, The Local Government White Paper, 2006¹⁸

“Citizens should have the opportunity and means to express their opinions about the services they receive, and to have them heard and acted on.”

Building on progress, Strategy Unit, 2007¹⁹

However, this research revealed these commitments have not yet been realised by either the public engagement activities that are actually taking place, as outlined in **Engagement and the Policy Making Process**, or by the attitudes of the civil servants

¹⁶ This is detailed in Annex B of this report

¹⁷ Cabinet Office (2004) op.cit.

¹⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and Prosperous Communities*. London: DCLG

¹⁹ Strategy Unit (2007) op.cit.

and politicians who commission and respond to those activities. Instead, these findings reveal there is little consensus within government about either the meaning of the term public engagement, or what its role should be in policy making.

This lack of consensus became clear as the interviewees in this study were asked to list public engagement activities in which they had recently been involved. The examples given ranged from attending parliamentary receptions, to running websites, responding to emails, meeting with campaign groups, commissioning opinion polls, or running consultation exercises and citizens' summits. When asked to describe the purpose of public engagement, responses were similarly wide-ranging:

"I think it's, um, a combination of consultation, um, er, listening and selling."

Interviewee 15 (Local government)

"Public engagement to me means finding out what people think baseline, finding out how people react to different suggestions or policy suggestions and finding out how people react once things are in place and in particular with the things I work with its finding out what motivates people and what their concerns are and using that information possibly to come up with better policies."

Interviewee 10 (National government)

"...engagement's a nice fancy word but, erm, I guess really taking the time to talk to the people that effectively you're delivering services for, to find out what they want, what you're doing well, what you're doing not so well, erm, and off it really finding out what you need to be delivering."

Interviewee 11 (Local government)

"...it's got a number of different uses (...) no-one is quite sure what it means."

Interviewee 14 (Local government)

This confusion as to what the term public engagement actually referred to was further evident in the discussion by participants as to its role in their work. Within the research, five different reasons were given for public engagement. Firstly, participants felt that public engagement in a policy area could open up "political space" – that is, it could stimulate and influence debate. However, as **Engagement and the Policy Making Process** describes, opening up "political space" does not necessarily lead to any activity related to policy, if the issue in question does not have the support of politicians and key policy makers. An interviewee who worked closely with politicians articulated this viewpoint:

"I'm a very policy focused person, and so what Joe Public means doesn't actually have that much, doesn't have a huge amount of bearing on me; but it's that huge noise in the background that sort of shapes everything"

Interviewee 7 (National government)

Secondly, participants identified public engagement as a way of educating the public as to the appropriateness of the policy proposals put forward by government. They saw public engagement as a form of marketing that could help “sell” policy, by educating the public about an issue and build public support for the government’s plans.

“...it makes our policies more robust, and for example on the climate change bill they need to be; they need to have the ownership of as many people as possible, because they’re going to have such a long and lasting impact. So it needs, it needs, it can’t just be imposed from a, one government, it needs to have, it needs to have the buy-in from society as a whole.”

Interviewee 7 (National government)

“...ask them how have the public been involved in shaping these targets and objectives, um, because without that, a key plank of sustainability is missing. Because if people don’t buy into it, um, then people will actually seek to undermine it, um, at every turn.”

Interviewee 6 (National government)

Related to the role of public engagement in “selling” policy, participants also identified public engagement as a way in which to educate the public to change their own behaviour; for example by encouraging them to eat more healthily, or affecting their energy-consumption or drinking habits. Here again, public engagement was seen to refer to information or marketing campaigns about modes of behaviour the government sought to promote as a policy. In this way, public engagement was also portrayed as a means for the government to influence the public; rather than as a form of two-way interaction:

“...it’s all about creating behaviour change [...]the key to all of it is how to give people a sense of ownership, that they are doing this thing because they own it, and it’s important to them, and it’s something they kind of take on and do, not because they’re being told to, but because it’s something pretty fundamental to the way in which they see themselves as a person and their relationship with their community.”

Interviewee 14 (Local government)

Fourthly, some participants defined public engagement as activities that could foster public “buy-in” for decisions and services, by ensuring that they are aligned with public needs, or by persuading the public of their value. This approach was used by those who felt that engagement offered not only an opportunity for Government to influence the public, but also for the public to influence the way in which government developed policy. This two-way ethos of interaction appears in stark contrast to those who primarily saw engagement as about one-way traffic; as

a way to educate or keep on side the public. This perspective was more strongly held by those working in local government, who described being more closely reliant on consensus with local citizens for the success of policy:

"I think you've got to try and, you know, work with local people to try and find out what the trends are, and find different intelligence for what the issues are, to try and help ensure that all the strategies and policies that we're developing actually are there catering for the needs of local people. I think, I think we are here to serve local people, erm, and I think that's why I think they have to, kind of, have that input, and it needs to be stronger really."

Interviewee 16 (Local government)

The implications of this division between local and national respondents are discussed further on in this report when considering the differences in the willingness to engage with the public between these two structures of government.

Finally, a number of participants felt that public engagement happens because it has become an inescapable part of the policymaking process and as a result is something to be done as a matter of propriety rather than for its value. These participants also described their duty to engage with the public because it was part of the statutory requirements of a particular policy development process. Irritation about public engagement activities that take place because "others are doing it", or because it is seen to be the right thing to do, was widespread among the interviewees:

"...it's a box ticking exercise, this mechanism for people who have no constituency, no decision making and are routinely ignored by anyone who does actually have any influence over decision making; it's a sham"

Interviewee 14 (Local government)

In addition to the five rationales listed above, it is interesting to note that those from party political backgrounds also spoke of an additional motivation to build stronger relationships with citizens:

"I think there's a very party political element to it as well, which is about a politician building a relationship with voters. (...) the days of politicians thinking they have all the answers to any questions the public could come up with are long gone. (...) there's a very clear electoral benefit to engaging the public in a conversation about what you as their elected representative are doing."

Interviewee 14 (Local government)

Many participants gave two or more reasons for engaging with the public. Highlighting this point is not to suggest that there should be a uniform answer to the

question, but rather reflects the uncertainty expressed and acknowledged by many participants about why and when to engage the public.

Returning to the social representations approach, it is interesting to note what was not talked about as well as what was said when public engagement was described. Whilst there was discussion of the role of the public in setting general policy direction through participation in social campaigns or public debates and political parties, and acknowledgement that by giving feedback as to how policy operates on the ground they could influence policy implementation, few of the participants outlined a role for the public in shaping policy. In the absence of discussion about the role of the public in shaping policy proposals, most of the interviewees perceived policy as something that is done for and to the public, rather than created in collaboration with them. Respondents from local government were more likely to see public engagement as an integral part of policy formation and delivery; yet they, too, recognised that more often than not, this is not what happens in practice. This absence of discussion of the role of the public in shaping policy stands in contrast to the stated intention in the policy documents set out above.

However, despite this confusion and scepticism, the majority of participants were positive about public engagement and wanted to be convinced that it could be of benefit to their work. 12 of 17 interviewees were overall positive about public engagement activities. This included 5 of 6 local and 7 of 12 national interviewees. Hence this research shows that the role and value of public engagement *is* being discussed in both national and local government. There was a great deal of interest among interviewees in what public engagement can deliver and how it can be more effectively incorporated into policymaking. Moreover, the study found that even those who were sceptical of the value of public engagement showed willingness to be convinced otherwise. One civil servant who had found himself coming around to the idea of public engagement explained his thinking:

"One point is, does it inform the policy process, is it useful and substantive? And I'd say probably no. But, two, does it build a broader climate, and I mean that not in the environmental sense, a broader climate of discussion and pro -, er, positiveness around our agendas? And the answer's probably yes then, because it's becoming, and this is where I'm coming from, it's becoming less policy, and less legislation and becoming a bit more, er, empowerment, and what can we do about it and a bit more positive. So I think it probably does. Being seen to be done isn't actually that harmful either, and, er, not just from a PR point of view, but from a, you know, creating a supportive context for, for the policies to then happen."

Interviewee 7 (National government)

This therefore reflects the opportunity this research reveals for intervention to address this scepticism and confusion in a way which upholds the value of engagement as part of the policymaking process. Yet to understand why there is confusion and scepticism about public engagement among civil servants – and so how to respond to it – requires looking beyond the Government's stated commitment to engage with citizens. In doing this, this research shows how the common reference points which

determined participants' attitudes to public engagement were not set by the public but rather by the interviewees' sense of their own value as professionals.

The discussion with participants about public engagement helped uncover five key factors that framed how they saw public engagement. These factors reflect how attitudes towards public engagement within the civil service are not segregated from institutional cultures but created by them. Firstly, participants saw policy as something to be created and decided upon by experts and then presented to the public. This was the "profession" of civil servants and as such the public, who were not professionals, were seen as limited in their capacity to perform this role. As a consequence, engagement with the public that is designed to give the public influence over policy appeared to undermine this professional standing.

Secondly, the use of external consultants or dedicated communications teams to deliver engagement activities meant that many participants viewed public engagement as a specialist enterprise requiring a particular set of skills which were not part of their training, rather than a way of working within government. This also served to reinforce internal divisions between those who produce policy research and analysis, and those who work within communications and engagement teams.

Finally, and related to this, the research showed that a lack of direct experience of public engagement in any substantial or consistent form meant that many participants could not envisage how it could be useful in their work. As a consequence, they did not seek to participate themselves in any engagement activities, resulting in a lack of experience as to what it can and cannot deliver.

Whilst these three factors can be said to reflect an underlying frame of reference regarding the "job" of being a public servant, two additional factors also influenced the way in which participants perceived public engagement. One was the notable difference between those within central and local government, with respondents from the latter being generally more positive about the role and value of public engagement in policymaking. The other was the way that the commitment to public engagement amongst participants was tempered by recognition of the reality of political considerations and ministerial priorities; in short their understanding of the "inner circle" of policymaking and the need to take account of the influence of other actors in the public realm.

The following sections look at each of these five factors in more detail, exploring how they are related to each other and to the institutional ethos of the civil service.

Years of training...and very technical....not like them.....

As already highlighted, this study shows how participants' sense of their own profession defined how they viewed the role of public engagement. The strong professionalism many participants attributed to their work, especially those in policy

roles, meant that they saw their job as something that requires a high level of expertise. Many participants were explicit about this and about how, as a consequence, asking lay citizens to make decisions was inappropriate.

"If you consider yourself an expert and have been schooled as such and have spent years getting a scientific background or whatever else, you might be more reluctant to say I'm going to try and speak to the man in the street, as at the end of the day it's potentially infringing on your expertise or that's how it can be perceived"

Interviewee 3 (National government)

In addition to acknowledging that engagement seemed counter to their professional role, participants often excluded the public from being able to perform their job by highlighting the technicality of their work. Of the respondents who worked in national government, 5 of 11 explicitly stated that there are some issues that are too complicated to make public engagement worthwhile, while the remainder also acknowledged the challenge of making complex information accessible. By stressing the difficulty of the subject matter, participants were able to reinforce the value of their role as an expert who could understand something and therefore assist society in making decisions about it.

"...there would be assumptions that this is just way too complicated, um, so, you know once you've actually discussed this through with the technical experts, what further, um, value there could be [in engaging the public]?"

Interviewee 6 (National government)

"...we couldn't give them [the public] all the information as it gets too complex and you just lose people [...] we couldn't have gone into the complexities of the legal situation [...] climate change can be very 'tech-y.'"

Interviewee 10 (National government)

In expressing the complexity of their work, some participants argued that other areas of Government policy were better suited for public engagement because they were less "technical". Arguing that the work of others was more suited to public engagement because it did not require as much specialist competence can therefore also be seen as a way of reinforcing the professional value of their work.

"...you're trying to deal with certainties and give people clear information for them to make decisions and I think in some of the policy spheres, you just can't do that."

Interviewee 3 (National government)

"...a wide issues with moral and ethical implications for people, then they should have more say.....or the death penalty or one of those other more emotive issues. Whereas other issues are more technical and specific."

Interviewee 9 (National government)

This competition was also evident in the high levels of scepticism about the quality of the public engagement activities that was known to be taking place elsewhere in government. In particular, participants questioned the value of activities run by other departments and teams. Many were frank in their criticisms, dismissing other departments' public engagement work as biased, methodologically weak, or a "waste of time". Their criticisms upheld the notion that there was a conflict between involving the public in policymaking and the need within the policy process for clear and expert advice:

"There's lots and lots of consultations that are about (...) either a political fix to get the answer that people want by, you know, slanting questions or only including certain groups that you think might agree with you."

Interviewee 14 (Local government)

"Yeah there are lots of examples where just speaking a bit more or getting people's feedback earlier on in the process could have saved a tremendous amount of heartache and money. I don't think it is particularly difficult to spot them, particularly the more high profile ones as they tend to be the things that actually attract quite a lot of scrutiny from different bodies, particularly the media, and then people are forced to backtrack and change their approach even when they're actually quite far down the line."

Interviewee 3 (National government)

Stakeholder vs. public engagement

These comments also reflect a presumption that there is a conflict between involving the public in policy making and the need within the policy process for clear and expert advice. The value of specialist expertise in policymaking was further highlighted through the distinction participants made between engaging with the public and engaging with "stakeholders". When asked to define what they meant by stakeholders, the majority of interviewees referred to them as individuals or organisations with an established interest and knowledge in a policy area. They used terms such as "experts", "people we have a relationship with", and "people who represent organisations with a detailed knowledge on the subject". The exceptions to this approach were concentrated amongst participants from local government, who were more likely to include the general public in their definition of stakeholders. This issue is explored in more detail below.

It was clear that because they are perceived to share the professional knowledge that being a civil servant requires, many respondents in both local and national

government saw stakeholder engagement as the most effective way of gathering information or outside views on a policy issue. Stakeholders were generally perceived as falling into one of two camps: as equally informed friends, or as “worthy foes”; meaning that whether or not they were in agreement with government policy, their views were respected and considered informed. These two quotations illustrate the attitudes to stakeholders among many of the interviewees:

“...if you’ve got a group of stakeholders, well, you know what they stand for and if they have a particular change of emphasis or view then that could actually be very significant. [...] you’ve got some idea of what they’re going to tell you, you know they’re experts, you can get quite a distilled set of informed views in quite a short space of time.”

Interviewee 2 (National government)

“I mean we write lengthy documents and they write lengthy documents and that’s very helpful as they’re experts. I think we’re less good at going to the wider public because often we deal with rather complex issues.”

Interviewee 9 (National government)

At this point again, it is useful to consider what was not discussed in the research. Whilst no participant explicitly described the public as “uninformed” or “unqualified”, the way they described their own job and the role of stakeholders meant that the public appeared in stark contrast; as the opposites to those in government or the external experts. They therefore became the group against which civil servants “objectified” themselves as different. This helped to further heighten the sense that the public are incapable of contributing to policy making if they are being asked to perform the same role as professionals; that they are “amateurs”.

This may also explain why for many participants, public engagement activities were about educating the public. They saw it as a way of sharing their expertise and explaining why the decisions they propose are correct. Several participants expressed the view that engaging the public often involves spending time and effort to educate participants about an issue before discussions can begin, making it a costly and time-consuming option. Again, in contrast, stakeholder engagement was widely considered a worthwhile time investment because stakeholders were already able to grasp the “technicalities” of the subject matter. Hence, in the context of such “informed” debate, public engagement is seen as an optional extra, providing outputs that decision makers can take or leave at will because they come from people who are not as well qualified to comment:

“...we’re looking at technical grounds and at the end of the day, the final decision is political and taken by councillors...so...obviously public views on those developments is taken into account and strength of feeling but...umm.”

Interviewee 13 (Local government)

"We decided as it was quite a complex issue, a citizen's jury would give our panelists the best opportunity to sort of understand the issues (...) So we decided fairly quickly that we needed to adopt a model for the engagement that would allow our members of the public, who we perceived were likely to be relatively uninformed at the outset, to become sufficiently informed and could ask a lot of questions and add value to the process."

Interviewee 4 (National government)

Some participants went further and questioned whether public engagement is worth doing if it was unlikely to add anything new that cannot be achieved more effectively through stakeholder engagement:

"I think that most people see this whole consultation thing as nonsense. I mean, there are people somewhere who say that we should consult the public but civil servants have been working on a matter for a long time, they're perceived to be the experts, they're dealing with experts from outside on, as I say, often very complicated matters so there is the general suspicion that consultation will not throw up anything new so why do this?"

Interviewee 9 (National government)

"...there are those that might think, 'is it really a valuable use of time?', even if the time isn't excessively long. 'What will it bring to this process, and particularly if we are engaging the experts, um, all the experts that we can find on this policy what can lay people really add to it?'"

Interviewee 6 (National government)

It can be argued that this sense of professionalism reflects the formal emphasis within government on a "rational-consensus" model of policy making as outlined in **Engagement and the Policy Making Process**. This model highlights the importance of objective and comprehensive advice to be offered to decision makers in determining the Government's policies. As a consequence, policy making is portrayed as something to be done by experts who are able to process information and present options for action. Public engagement is then judged on its capacity to offer a parallel source of expertise in making policy – and suffers as a consequence for being seen as in competition with, rather than a complement to the professional judgement of civil servants.

"Some consider engagement and reject it as time intensive or irrelevant, as they don't see how it will help in terms of their job. Some try and, in their view, don't get a satisfactory result so there's a whole host of reasons why people may not engage or take it on board."

Interviewee 3 (National government)

This shows some of the scepticism with public engagement as a way of shaping policy therefore reflects a dissatisfaction with the role it is being asked to play in relation to the role existing policy makers play. Indeed, the recent debate about the Government's plans for nuclear energy provides a case in point²⁰. Three interviewees brought up nuclear power as an example of an issue that was considered too controversial and "technical" for wider public engagement.

"...in areas like the nuclear question, I mean it's highly technical, it's difficult, it impinges on a number of different areas: climate change agenda; security of energy supply agenda; the fact that our current nuclear power stations are to close down in about 15 years and we may very well run out of electricity; the gas in the North Sea is declining and if we get it from Russia, they have shown they are quite willing to switch off the gas if it feels so inclined; and if you use lots of coal, you are producing carbon emission which is detrimental to climate change; so it is a huge area and very difficult and it's not saying the public can't have a view but it can be a bit tricky. When does the point come when government which is elected makes a decision? Is it a general course of action for the public to determine at the ballot box or for every single issue do we have to engage the public in such dramatic ways?"

Interviewee 9 (National government)

Even when interviewees recognised that members of the public would in principle have the capacity to contribute to discussions about complex policy issues, many questioned whether public engagement would be worth the effort considering the resources required to prepare and support the participants. These arguments again reflect how participants viewed the subject of public engagement through reference to their professional status:

"It's difficult to actually make an investment and bring people up to speed and then justifying what you're going to get from those people over and above what you would get from existing professionals."

Interviewee 5 (National government)

"I mean, your average man in the street is certainly capable of understanding, to my mind, the challenge of sustainable use of resources and the challenge of sustainable living but I'm not sure whether they actually do understand, I mean they're capable of it but I'm not sure whether they actually do."

Interviewee 4 (National government)

²⁰ In February 2007 a High Court judge ruled that the public consultation that had preceded the Government's nuclear plans was "misleading", "seriously flawed" and "procedurally unfair", resulting in the Government being forced to design a new consultation process. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6364281.stm)

Just another tool?

The professional nature of their role within Government was also reinforced by the way in which participants described public engagement as something that in itself requires a particular set of skills. This in turn engendered a sense among some of the interviewees that public engagement was “just another tool” rather than a new approach to making policy.

“I think it needs to be at the heart of what we do more than it is at the moment, but I think the risk is, you know, we turn it into another profession, um, and, actually you want *all* of your public servants thinking about ‘what do people think? What do people think? How do I know? How do I listen? How do I respond? How do I sell?’ [...] my anxiety is that it’s seen as this thing over here with a little sign about ‘we do public engagement’. It actually has to be kind of completely marbled through the activities of government.”

Interviewee 15 (Local government)

“I think it is for officials to understand the value of going out there and talking to people and it needs to be a mindset rather than set of rules, I think there is a real disconnect there. People with the mindset came up with a set of rules and people without the mindset just obey the rules without actually doing it.”

Interviewee 9 (National government)

Compounding the sense of internal frustration and competition among interviewees was a sense that particular engagement methods have “taken hold within government”. With departments copying each other’s processes and competing to be seen to lead the way in public engagement practice, certain models have become the process of choice, at times at the expense of careful consideration about whether or not they are the right approach for the purpose. This dominance of particular engagement models fed the sense of confusion amongst participants about the difference between process and purpose in public engagement, with certain models becoming seen as valuable in their own right, rather a means to an end. Throughout the study, interviewees relied on a definition of public engagement based firmly in a particular method, viewing the method as synonymous with the engagement as a way of working. However, as demonstrated in **Engagement and the Policy Making Process**, no one model for public engagement will fit all needs. The political context, the history of the issue at hand, the timing of the activity, and the demographic of the citizens affected, are all among the factors that determine the choice of engagement method.

This created a barrier to engagement and was enforced by two factors. Firstly, the tendency for engagement activities to be seen as the responsibility of communication and engagement professionals within the civil service, and so by default not related to the work of policy officials per se. Secondly, the use of external

contractors to conduct activities heightened the perception that engagement required a set of skills and knowledge about processes and methodology that did not exist within government. The influence of these factors is described in more detail below.

Champions and the oblivious

Turning first to the division between policy officials and engagement teams, it was clear within the research that the majority of interviewees who were positive about the role of public engagement in policymaking were located in communications teams or dedicated public engagement departments. As already stated, the majority of participants were open to the value of public engagement. However, those who were sceptical or dubious were all in policy roles. Those within political roles were mixed, as these two quotes by participants working in political roles in central government illustrate:

"For me, public participation is not just consulting people, asking for their view; it's demonstrating to them that their view is then listened to, acted upon; that it really made a difference. More than that; it's actually establishing a dialogue with the public."

Interviewee 1 (National government)

"I've yet to see [public engagement activities] doing, add any value other than be able to be seen to do stuff."

Interviewee 7 (National government)

Those working within communications and engagement teams tended to be more aware of public engagement in other departments and organisations, and were more likely to learn from or share lessons with people in similar roles across government. In contrast, those individuals working in policy teams were more likely to be oblivious of public engagement activities outside their department, and sometimes even of processes taking place within their own department. The research also found that there existed a lower awareness among policy officials about the range of public engagement methods available, including newer forms of deliberative and participative engagement. Three policy officials were entirely sceptical, one of whom had had no personal involvement in public engagement. One had had some experience, but was committed to stakeholder engagement, and the last had had minimal involvement but did not perceive it to be worth the expenditure. The quotation below demonstrates this:

"People working in communications in government particularly within marketing have spent years saying we need to link policy with communications and make sure we use feedback and insights on the general public in terms of the way we develop policy and communications. There are pockets where it is very familiar and accepted but also places where people are a lot less aware of it."

Those working in policy teams or in political roles were more likely to refer to public engagement as any form of interaction with people outside government, including talking to stakeholders, responding to emails, or working with the media. In contrast, individuals in communications roles or with direct experience of public engagement were more likely to view public engagement as structured activities that the government undertake to gauge public views on an issue, or to engage the public in discussions about policy. These findings are supported by previous research done by *Involve*²¹, which found that different groups tend to have divergent aspirations for public engagement. In particular, it is common for those working in policy teams charged with responding to public engagement activities to hold expectations that do not match either the objectives set by those running the processes, or the government's strategic objectives for public engagement.

When these individuals are confronted with public engagement outputs that do not match their expectations, and do not fit neatly into their policy plans, the risk is that they become disillusioned with the idea of public engagement and reluctant go down that route again. One interviewee from a communications background explained how they had observed this happening among colleagues:

"I think some only hear one side of the story and they think 'ah right, if we can engage them, get them involved, talk them through, then they will share ownership of our decisions and controversy would go away', and I think some of those policy makers who come at it from this angle end up disappointed because they think, 'well what's all this talk that engagement will help to develop shared ownership. No it didn't, we did everything we could to engage them – took them to nice hotels and had long discussion groups and, er, they still didn't like what we said'."

This quote reflects how those working within communications and engagement teams also felt frustrated by the lack of understanding of their role in the policy process among colleagues from other departments. This contributed to the divide between engagement activities and policy making, as both groups of officials valued their distinctive professional role to decision makers.

The role of the public engagement industry

The perception that performing engagement activities required specialist knowledge also enforced the notion that engagement is a tool to be applied to communicating policy making, rather than a way of making policy. This was demonstrated for respondents by the use of consultants to run engagement activities. Several interviewees expressed concern about the professionalisation of public engagement practice, and irritation with the industry that surrounded it:

²¹ Gavelin, K and Wilson, R with Doubleday, R (2007) op.cit.

"I think it has become a fairly sophisticated, um, business, how to engage the public effectively."

Interviewee 6 (National government)

"...with due respect people like yourselves were piggybacking off [names project] and that was they way into this debate, and it almost seems as if it provided an open door into the policy world."

Interviewee 5 (National government)

"...there is a lot of literature on how to communicate, how to engage, how to set up stakeholder groups, you know. Perhaps there's too much actually."

Interviewee 4 (National government)

The research found that frustrations about the growing use of public engagement in policy are fed by the outsourcing of processes to external consultants, or to be dealt with by dedicated communications teams internally. This had two clear impacts on policy respondents. Firstly it supported a perception that public engagement was a form of marketing technique to be practised by specialists in other departments. Secondly, it also meant those working in policy teams were often at the receiving end of public engagement outputs rather than involved in shaping them, so they were denied the opportunity to build their own understanding of different approaches to public engagement and their value.

It can also be argued that the latent hostility towards the role of external consultants reflected the concern that public engagement is perceived as an alternative way to make policy, rather than a complement to the work of civil servants. The external consultants who bring in knowledge about public engagement practice then represent another question mark over the capacity of the civil service to perform these functions. Here again, the research reveals how understanding the capacity of those who work in government to engage with the public requires understanding of how they see their role within government and the institutional ethos which defines their identity as a "civil servant".

Personal experience makes all the difference....

The study suggests that one way to address the concerns that civil servants may have about public engagement is to expose them to engagement activities. The reported experiences of participants who had taken part in a public engagement activity revealed giving more civil servants the opportunity to be directly involved in public engagement activities helped break down scepticism about its value to

policy making. The research showed how those interviewees who had participated in a public engagement activity were significantly more enthusiastic about its benefits. Of those who were positive about public engagement, half had specifically mentioned that their positivity was due to their own involvement, and that they or others had been directly influenced by their experience.

“For the policy makers, the policy colleagues recruited to work on public engagement were actually all very enthusiastic and some of them started being mildly enthusiastic and finished being very enthusiastic, and are now advocates for the value of public engagement amongst their colleagues.”

Interviewee 6 (National government)

“...when it’s done right you, you see a tremendous change both, both amongst officials and the public. Erm, from coming to it with a large degree of scepticism: ‘what’s all this engagement? What will it do?’ to people gradually, as they go through the process, coming to, becoming really convinced that something is worthwhile here, they can influence the outcome, becoming much more confident and engaged in the process.”

Interviewee 6 (National government)

“There is actually a lot of expertise in government, you’ve just got to go and find it. And my experience of that is that people who’ve been involved in public engagement are more than happy to share their experiences, because they get very enthusiastic about it.”

Interviewee 6 (National government)

This demonstrates that active involvement in engagement activities can play a key role in helping civil servants develop a way of “anchoring” and “objectifying” engagement processes as part of their job. This in turn can help overcome misconceptions about what public engagement is and is not able to deliver, as well as revealing its capacity to deliver benefits to policy outcomes.

One civil servant’s experience of running a citizens’ jury on a complex scientific topic provides a useful example of how taking part can convince officials of the worth of public engagement:

“Well, we gained first hand experience of designing and running something like this was useful as it raised awareness of the possibilities of engagement and practical issues around it which I think is important in terms of institutional awareness and also capacity. I suppose it also makes it more likely that people from outside will be brought in to talk about the issues if there is more awareness of the possibilities. But I would guess someone like [names colleague] would probably say he didn’t learn anything new about the science, there wasn’t anything groundbreaking in that regard; and as regards the policy agenda, I think the observations of the groups chimed very well with and reinforced views within Defra and views within the

Agency about a number of issues relating to [the issue]. So again there were no earth shattering revelations from the process, but we feel that we built a good relationship with the members of the public that were involved, we feel we went some way towards building trust with that group [...] it seems to me there should be a role for engagement in helping the population at large understand the issues them take better decisions.”

Interviewee 4 (National government)

Local versus national engagement

The discussion so far has centred on how public engagement activities are perceived by civil servants in relation to their own work identity. Yet the research also showed that there were two additional factors that also created barriers to engagement. The first of these was the gap between the attitudes to public engagement among people working in central government and those working in local government. Overall, the research shows respondents from local government were more positive about public involvement in their work as a whole, including it in both policy formation and implementation. This corresponds with the discussion in **Engagement and the Policy Making Process** regarding the ability of locally led public engagement to offer clearer evidence of its value.

The primary distinction between interviewees from local and those from national government was that those from local government were more likely to identify the public, their constituents, as stakeholders in policy development and implementation. Those who did argued that members of the public, by virtue of being citizens, had a built-in stake in a policy. 4 out of 6 local government interviewees compared to just 3 of 11 national government interviewees identified the public as stakeholders. Most were aware that it was an arguable point, and had chosen to come down on one side or the other. Both local and national interviewees recognised the challenges associated with facilitating meaningful engagement about complex issues, but the local interviewees had more experience of this, and provided more examples of times when this had been achieved.

“I think you’ve got to try and, you know, work with local people to try and find out what the trends are, and find different intelligence for what the issues are, to try and help ensure that all the strategies and policies that we’re developing actually are there catering for the needs of local people. I think, I think we are here to serve local people, erm, and I think that’s why I think they have to, kind of, have that input, and it needs to be stronger really.”

Interviewee 16 (Local government)

This recognition of the public’s stake in policies had a strong impact on the positivity of local government interviewees towards public engagement and to their ambition to use public engagement activities to influence decision making, as well as policy direction and delivery. To some extent, the differences in attitudes between central

and local government officials can be attributed to the different constraints facing the two groups. In local government both civil servants and elected officials tend to come into contact with residents on a regular basis. Since councillors and local authority officers often share the same constituents, they often engage with the same residents in parallel or together. In contrast, civil servants working for central government come into less contact with citizens through their work. National political representatives have substantial contact with the public in the course of their role as representatives, yet often this is dominated by casework rather than discussions on policy per se.

As discussed in **Engagement and the Policy Making Process**, it is easier to facilitate public engagement and direct experience of interacting with the public for those working in local government through virtue of their proximity in comparison to those who work in national government. Notwithstanding that it is easier when “on the ground” to interact with the public in making policy, the ethos of recognising the general public as stakeholders with as important an interest in policies as the experts, is central to promoting true appreciation of the value of public engagement within government.

The elephant in the room....

The final factor the research revealed to be critical in understanding how civil servants view public engagement reflects the reality of the policy making process. As described in **Engagement and the Policy Making Process**, influence over policy is not equally open to all actors in the public realm, but resides disproportionately within an inner circle of individuals and organisations whose input is valued by decision makers. This means that any public engagement in policy will always be tempered by consideration of how others in the public realm will view the proposals any engagement activity bring forward. Thus, commitment to public engagement is tempered by recognition of political considerations and priorities. Civil servants in central government within the study were acutely aware of the range of actors and interests to be balanced in making policy. Many spoke of a tension between the commitment or obligation to engage with the public, and the need to respond to fast-changing developments in policy and politics.

“...the messages to policy makers are communicate and engage externally as early as possible. [...] but there potentially can be, either ‘I’ve got to deliver quickly’ or a minister’s got a very clear view of what he wants. [...] sometimes there are tensions between, you have to get things done quickly, and sometimes, you just have to get things done.”

Interviewee 6 (National government)

“...am I disingenuous going out there and doing all that work when I know perfectly well that 90% of what I bring back will be disregarded (by the minister)?”

Interviewee 9 (National government)

As we have seen, public engagement was not portrayed as a way of engaging the public directly in decision making. Rather, the outputs of public engagement were treated as one form of evidence among many, which decision makers can take or leave at will. In the hierarchy of the “inner circle”, the outcomes of public engagement are commonly considered secondary to both political reality and the advice of trusted stakeholders:

“...we go through all of what we receive and analyse it, and decide in light of all these responses, whether our case is robust, whether something new has emerged which would affect our policy and whether or not we need to alter our policy”

Interviewee 9 (National government)

“...it’s not a referendum, it’s participating in the policy shaping and when government have heard those views they may decide on what action they may or may not take”

Interviewee 9 (National government)

“On particular issues, erm, ministers feel under pressure to deliver quickly. Uh, whilst they’d like to get a big public consensus, it’s not always, it’s sometimes the business of government just doesn’t allow for that, you just have to get up and make things happen [...] so depending on the issue and the circumstances, erm, there are legitimate reasons why you’d either cut short your consultation [...] or focus it on a small number of experts because you, you need the information quickly.”

Interviewee 6 (National government)

This study also revealed that many participants saw tensions between public engagement practices and traditional democratic decision making processes. This again reflects how participants viewed public engagement through reference to existing roles and institutions – through their understanding of how policy is currently made- when thinking about whether it could be used in their work.

The promotion of public engagement as a complement to representative democracy, with the potential to inform and improve government decision making raised questions for both partisan and non-partisan actors within government about the democratic credentials of the public engagement activities themselves. The participants expressed concerns that public engagement was promoted as a democratic practice when the reality is often different; the majority of public engagement activities are small-scale, ad-hoc and unrepresentative. There were also concerns that public engagement activities may undermine democratic institutions, by challenging the views and decisions of elected representatives:

“...actually there are some democracies where if you decide very important things through engagement consistently then it has strong implications for the democracy,

and that's fine if that's where people want to go but I think you'll effectively go to a more referendum style of government and we'd need to be careful of that because there could be a backlash. There are lots of situations where that may not be the best way to go."

Interviewee 10 (National government)

"...one of my biggest concerns with [names process] is that the judgment in judicial review has placed consultation very close to referendum and there is a material danger. We need to very clearly communicate to the public [that] it is participation in the policy making process, it is not the decision making process and for us it's therefore to be as honest as possible and say where we think they can make a difference."

Interviewee 9 (National government)

One interviewee cautioned that public participation activities must not be seen a replacement for traditional political activism, such as joining a party or contacting your MP, but rather should act as complement to traditional democratic structures:

"I think this whole thing about public engagement has to link to politics and political parties, all political parties, because we have to make them respectable and strong and, er, be a very honourable thing that people want to be involved in a political party. So, all of these public engagement structures shouldn't be structures to bypass councillors, MPs and local democratic structures, they've got to be knitted into those structures to make them, in my view, the right answer. Otherwise, people will see it as a threat, as a challenge, and it'll set the whole idea of public engagement back."

Interviewee 1 (National government)

Thus, whilst there is interest in what role public engagement could play in securing policy outcomes, it is tempered by recognition of the policy making process as a whole and the need to uphold the value of political representatives as the final democratically elected decision makers. Interestingly, that many of the participants felt there was a divide between the concerns of their political masters and public engagement activities was in contrast to the views of many of the political participants themselves, who were open to the value of public engagement in shaping policy directly. As one elected official said:

"The future of democratic politics is, is in this direction. The handed down, top down solutions are in the past – I'm not going to do it in the future. Clever public sector organisations already will have realised that and really will have built relationships with their local communities, but lots still haven't."

Interviewee 1 (National government)

That this openness to the possibility of public engagement has not yet permeated the institutional culture of government reflects the challenge presenting those wishing to shift from engagement being seen as a tool for achieving outcomes to a new way of working. This research also shows overcoming the barrier of concerns that public engagement may produce politically unpalatable results requires setting out a constructive role for public engagement activities within the structures of representative democracy rather than as a replacement.

This chapter has illustrated the five key factors that frame how participants in this study view public engagement. It shows that public engagement is not seen as a discrete way of working. Instead, the institutional ethos of professionalism that civil servants use to define their role in government is also applied to understanding the value of public engagement. The “common reference points” which are used come not from looking at public engagement as a way of working, but from how policy has been previously shaped by professional civil servants. In doing so, public engagement activities are seen as wanting, requiring those without the expertise or skill to interpret and understand complex policy issues to make decisions and challenging the value of those with such knowledge. Whilst exposure to public engagement activities can help overcome these concerns, it is clear this is easier to consistently achieve at a local rather than national level. Furthermore, concerns that political expediency and engagement are incompatible pre-empts for many participants openness to the role that engagement could play. The willingness of participants ask how public engagement could become a new way of working for government shows that none of these factors presents an impenetrable barrier. In the next section this paper asks how these barriers could be addressed to help challenge the institutional cultures which limit the capacity of government to engage.

4: What does this all mean? Public engagement and institutional culture

This research reveals both the opportunities and the challenges facing those seeking to promote public engagement in policy making within local and national government. The prevalence of cultural barriers to engagement within the civil service does not mean that they are fixed or immutable. Changing institutional cultures to enable those who work in government to be open to the role that public engagement can play in policy making outlined in the overview to this report requires looking at how the “common reference points” of public engagement have been developed. This then helps identify how best to contribute to changing these in order to secure a culture in which engagement becomes something those within government see as core to their way of working rather than combative exercise. The opportunity now exists for an honest discussion about the cultural barriers to engagement and how to address them. This section looks at the key lessons from the research which could inform this debate.

Experts to Navigators: upholding professional identity and engagement

Using the research approach of social representations offers not only a systematic exploration of the relationship between civil service identity and public engagement but also a way to understand how to respond to the issues this presents. This is because it helps understand the relationship between such perceptions and the personal and social identities of those who hold them; in this case revealing how the sense of professional identity civil servants have created influences their view of public engagement. The role of attitudes and perceptions in creating and maintaining individual and group identities has been developed in several social representational studies²². For those concerned with how representations may be changed then it is question not just of the particular attitude or perception itself but what it offers to its owners as a way of defining themselves and how any change would affect the personal or social identities in question.

In this instance it is clear that the way in which public engagement is promoted to those within government conflicted for many participants with their sense of professional identity. Indeed, in the discussion of public engagement it is often presented as a “battle” between those in government and the public. Therefore, encouraging civil servants to engage with the public requires finding ways of describing the role of public in the policy process not as an alternative to their professional judgement but rather as an opportunity for them to use this in assisting the public to make good decisions. In asking what language and narratives may help develop this perception, it is useful to draw upon the remarks of Ed Miliband MP, the then Minister of State for the Third Sector. Mr Millband set out how building services which could respond to users required recognition of the role of professionals as “navigators” in engaging the public. He argued:

²² Creasy 2006 *ibid*.

"I think this makes the role of the public services professional more not less important. Because the public servant must have the capacity not just to deliver a service but engage the user in the co-production of that service – a much harder task. And we know from some outstanding examples of success in the public sector over the last few years the difference public service workers can make. Personal Advisers in Job Centres now engage and respect job seekers in a way the old system never allowed them to do. And I know from my own conversations with people about their personal advisors what an incredibly positive experience it often is. What I learn from this is that there are outstanding examples of frontline staff who are already teaching us in practice how they can share power with users. And crucially, what enables them to empower users is that they have been given the discretion and flexibility which empowers them. But what I also know is that this approach could be far more widespread than it is. And also that many frontline staff could contribute far more to the service if they had the right means of communication and dialogue with the centre about the way the service is run. So we need to examine where else the navigator and advisor function needs to be strengthened, and we need to recognise that the best people to redesign services are often frontline staff. We need to find new ways of enabling them to be part of the conversation about how services can improve."

Ed Miliband MP, Unison and Compass conference, 18th January 2007²³

The "story" of using professional skills and expertise to help the public navigate social change, be it in the kind of policy decisions government makes or in leading fulfilling lifestyles, stands in contrast to the promotion of public engagement as a way of overriding public concern at the legitimacy of decisions that government makes. However, it is clear from this study the benefits of such an approach as a way of overturning perceptions that public engagement activities are an attack on civil service expertise. Finding ways to turn public participation processes into a way to uphold and further professional status will therefore be critical to the capacity of government at both a local and national level to engage.

Speak policy not process

This research showed clearly the divide between those in communications and engagement teams who value engagement and those who work in policy roles, who feel that public engagement is something done after policy decisions have been made. As a consequence, many of those in policy roles felt unsure about the value of public engagement activities to their work. In turn, many of those working in communications and engagement teams expressed frustrations with the expectations those in policy roles were felt to have about what engagement activities could – and couldn't – achieve. This divide between policy roles and communication and engagement roles further emphasised the sense that engagement activities were a form of marketing rather than a way of working.

²³ Miliband, E (2007) 'Putting Users and Communities at the Heart of Public Services'. Speech to Unison and Compass at RIBA, 18th January 2007

Upholding this division was also one way of reinforcing the professional value of each job and those who performed it – in contrast to the other. There was also evidence that this professional competitiveness also coloured the way in which the work of other departments was viewed, helping to further divide officials and so make sharing learning about how and when public engagement can benefit policy making more difficult.

Addressing the divide both between policy and communications teams, and between departments, could therefore help spread both collaborative working and increase awareness of the outcomes public engagement can offer policy making. This is both a practical and philosophical concern. Practically, encouraging policy officers to engage directly with the public and with communications teams in policy making, rather than communicating policy after it is proposed, could help in breaking down interdepartmental barriers. So too, helping share experiences using public engagement to inform policy with others in government in a manner which isn't about interdepartmental competition but collaboration will also develop the knowledge of all involved as to what works – and what doesn't.

Yet this research shows that addressing this divide requires more than making policy and communications teams interact. It is also about the way in which public engagement is portrayed and its relationship to the policy issue in hand. The confusion and scepticism described in the research shows how this lack of understanding of the value of public engagement to achieving policy solutions made it seem an additional rather than integral way of achieving desired outcomes. When public engagement is seen as part of solving policy problems, rather than perceived problems with the policy making process such as the legitimacy of the decisions it makes, it becomes something of value to policy officials in their work. Developing this philosophy – of speaking to “their” policy objectives rather than to “the” objective of engagement – could help to increase both interest and interaction in engagement work across all forms of jobs within the civil service. This means focusing less on methods and more on the purpose of engagement, encouraging policy officials and communication teams from across government to concentrate on what they have in common – the issue – rather than the question of how or why they should work with the public.

In finding this new way to talk about policy problem solving rather than public engagement *per se*, it is important to use the opportunity presented by the acknowledged role that the public can play in other aspects of the Government's work. This shows how developing the capacity to engage with the public within the civil service does not start from a tabula rasa. This research highlighted that there is an understanding of the value of engaging with the public in both developing policy direction and implementation. However, this research also highlighted the gap in understanding about what value engagement activities could play in developing policy itself, particularly amongst those who work in policy making in national government. Rather than seeing each of these elements of the policy making process as distinct areas in which to promote engagement, showcasing the benefits of public engagement in policy direction and implementation activities could help set the scene for engagement in policy making itself. In its analysis of case studies, **Engagement and the Policy Making Process** offers points for how this

could take place. Again, this requires connecting back “reference” points from these activities to successful policy outcomes rather than public engagement processes *per se*. These examples would then offer ways to “objectify” public engagement within the policy making process itself.

Get people to go along and take part

The research also revealed the power of participation on civil servants as a way of encouraging them to explore the value of public engagement activities to their work. Time and time again, those who had directly taken part in an activity or even contributed to designing it, were much more likely to champion engaging with the public in policy making. Those in local government were also more likely to have regular contact with the public - a point discussed in further detail below- and so also more likely to see the role for this in their working practices. In contrast, for many civil servants in national government and especially those in policy roles, engagement with the public was something they were aware of “in principle” and not “in practice”. Consequently in thinking through how to build into their work public engagement they did not have any experiences to draw upon in describing what the term meant.

Direct participation can offer concrete experiences of how engagement can help in policy making. This matters to changing cultures because it offers the opportunity to learn new stories and ideas to share with others about what public engagement offers which are personal and so valuable to them. Indeed, several participants in this research described how such experiences had helped them think through policy and consider new options for progress as well as understand public opinion. Supporting the participation of civil servants in engagement activities, even if these are not necessarily conducted by the departments in which they work, can foster capacity to engage because it offers an opportunity to experience first hand what engagement offers whether to communications teams or policy makers.

Local and national distinction

As **Engagement and the Policy Making Process** argues, a local perspective is useful in helping citizens engage and ensuring that activities are matched to the concerns that exist in their locality. The lessons this offers for securing cultural change rather than the practicalities of organising public engagement activities are less clear cut. It is not clear quite why those from local government have a different culture which determines their view of engagement. This may reflect a different ethos overall in local government to national government, or simply the closer nature of the public to the policy process as a whole; that those in local government are less able to avoid the public and so more resigned to working with them. It is not within the scope of this research to address this question, but clearly these lead to two different concerns for public engagement. Should it be the former then more research is required to understand how local government has developed such an ethos in contrast to national government. Should it be the latter, this shows the practical

importance of building a local perspective into engagement in policy making to enable all those involved to benefit from being “close to the action”.

The value of political leadership – and democracy

Another key point the research outlined was the need for political leadership on engagement as a new way for government work. Many participants expressed concern about the need to balance the demands of the public with the priorities of their political masters. The research also showed that the political actors within the study were often willing to find new ways of working. In the first instance, encouraging political representatives to lead the debate and discussion within government about how to build public engagement into policy problem solving, as a distinct process from consulting on decisions already made, would help reassure those who are concerned about the potential for conflict between the public and political priorities.

“I think the government’s at the earliest stages of it, but it’s just kind of culture change, isn’t it, that’s needed. [...] The problem with the government and government bodies is this: it’s kind of doing it in a tick box kind of a way. ‘Yes, we’re doing some public engagement’. It seems to me that that’s the big question – are they really doing it? Opening up the decision making processes, the whole organisation to proper public engagement [...] I think most are still in the tick box place.”

Interviewee 1 (National government)

Yet the concerns that were raised also call into question the need for all those who seek to promote public engagement as a way of working to do more to address how such practices fit into the democratic process. Encouraging a culture of engagement within government will require more than statements of support from Ministers or Secretaries of State; it requires a greater degree of clarity of how in a representative democracy public engagement can be used to deepen and strengthen the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives. Civil servants and the institutions they represent rightly see themselves as mediating this relationship. In the absence of transparency over how to address questions about the legitimacy and inclusivity of any public engagement process, and how these processes fit into the “inner circle” approach to policymaking, difficulties will remain with promoting public engagement as a way of working. It is beyond the realms of this research paper to suggest how these issues could be resolved but it is vital that they are taken into account when asking how best to encourage a culture of engagement in the civil service.

Conclusion

The previous section set out how the “common reference points” of a civil service professional identity frames the institutional capacity of government to engage with

the public. The analysis in this section is primarily rooted in understanding how to connect with the narrative ideas, images and identities which are used to frame that debate. Taking a social representations approach to studying culture helps identify how these narratives are both important to cultural identities, and how they are pliable. Put simply, effecting cultural change requires identifying the alternative explanations and stories which can challenge those which act as a barrier to engagement. This is uncomfortable territory for any institution; recognising that changing the way in which it works with the public requires changing the way in which those who work for the government see their role is not likely to occur overnight. However, this research shows this will be integral to achieving the kind of public engagement in policy making the government states is its desire.

It is inevitable that such a process of change will require more than better internal communications or marketing or that it can be achieved in a short space of time. This research therefore should be seen as an entry point into understanding some of the cultural challenges that exist rather than offering a complete action plan for change. Indeed, if it can be used to start the debate as to how and why these factors inhibit the role of the public in policy making to the detriment of policy making itself, it will have made an important contribution. In the absence of such cultural change however, it is important for those seeking to affect any policy area to understand how and when public engagement can be effective. It is this question which is the concern of the final conclusion of this report.

Putting the Pieces Together: Climate Change and Public Engagement

At the time of writing, there exist a number of policy initiatives to engage both the UK public and the global community on the issue of climate change. These include those tackling awareness-raising, behaviour change, local or global emissions and the development of a joined up political approach. Whether through the “Live Earth” concert and Climate Campaign, or the DEFRA Climate Challenge Fund, there is now a substantial push to make climate change a matter of concern not just for environmental groups but for all citizens. Yet whilst it can be argued that the UK public have become highly aware of global warming as a concept, this does not at present translate into support for a coherent set of policy proposals. MORI opinion data reveals that 67% of the population believe “they know a great deal” or “a fair amount” about global warming and only 1% of the population claim to have “never heard of” it²⁴. However, MORI also report that public understanding as to what this means in practise is comparatively low; 70% of the population could not name Carbon Dioxide as the gas which most contributes to global warming. Furthermore, data on the activities of the public which could be said to help cut emissions shows varying levels of take up – from relatively high levels of support for recycling, to much lower levels of support for reducing car use. This confusion hampers not only public debate of climate change but also policy action. Put simply, for progress to be made and for public engagement to assist in the tackling of climate change, citizens need to be clear about what they are asking government to do and willing to bear the consequences that this could have on their lives.

This reflects a critical issue facing those seeking to engage the public in tackling climate change through their own behaviour, let alone in designing ways for public policy to do so too. Two of the most successful engagement activities considered in this report – Make Poverty History and the National Pensions Debate – both revolved around a single topic. Whilst they sought action on a range of actual policy proposals, backed up by specialist and detailed information for those who were interested, the subject areas, pensions and international development, were conceptually discrete. In contrast, climate change can be seen as a “meta-policy” area, requiring action across a range of superficially distinct policy issues and departments. Whether around transport, energy policy, house building, regeneration and sustainable development, immigration, international development or science and industry proposals; each arena has a part to play.

Given the scale of this challenge, it is vital that the Sustainable Development Commission reflect on the lessons of this research and the challenges for using public engagement activities to improve policymaking. Clearly it cannot – and should not if it is to be effective – seek to take on all the issues raised in this research or indeed the policy areas or departments involved. This report shows that judging when public

²⁴ MORI – The Day After Tomorrow: Public Opinion on Climate Change Norton A Leaman J MORI Social Research Institute 2004

engagement can influence policy making requires an understanding of the broader public policy making context; of the way in which policy is made through the “inner circle” approach.

These factors contribute to the lack of defined role for the public in actual policy decisions. This creates a barrier to understanding how public engagement in policy making decisions can improve policy making, as opposed to just gain support for decisions to be made. Indeed, even the Pensions Debate was primarily defined as a way of helping the public understand the decisions that the Turner Report wanted Government to make, rather than a way for stakeholders and the public to directly influence the options open to them. Yet as the discussion of this case study note, in allowing participants to contribute to designing the process and raise the matter of linking pensions to average earnings, the public policy debate ultimately enhanced the public policy outcomes achieved.

The success of some of the examples in using public engagement to aid effective policy-making is clear, as is the willingness of civil servants to be convinced that it can be beneficial. Yet it is also apparent from this report that there is still a long way to go if public engagement is to be used to its full potential. Above all there is a need for action to help policy makers and politicians understand the value and validity that good public engagement can bring to outcomes, rather than just knowing “it’s a good thing to do” or be seen to perform. Until this occurs, these research reports illustrate that it is likely that public engagement is at the limits of what it can achieve without a concurrent cultural change in government to address these issues. In particular, this research suggests that pushing public engagement in any policy topic may be counterproductive for policy progress because of the barriers to engagement that exist within Government. Consequently, those seeking to use public engagement to promote policy change on climate change must differentiate between the twin ambitions of promoting policy action on climate change and promoting public engagement in policy as a whole. In response to this challenge, the research team propose the following recommendations for consideration by the Sustainable Development Commission in taking forward their work.

Impartial and informed: being the honest broker

Whilst not an issue directly considered in this paper, it is clear a key priority of the climate change debate is to ensure general awareness of the issue is used as a springboard for specific policy action in government and behaviour change for the public. In helping bring about that change, the Sustainable Development Commission could play a clear role as an “honest broker” on climate change. This would focus on being “navigators” for climate change. This would mean being the organisation that built the relationships and networks within government and externally in the public realm that could help take the public, policymakers and politicians on the “journey” required for policy action to address global warming. Indeed as an independent body, the Sustainable Development Commission is well placed to play this role in contrast to other organisations considered to represent a particular interest group such as Government, NGOs or businesses.

In practical terms, this “broker” role could be done through focusing on two roles; firstly being the “broker” of information on climate change which is deemed objective and fair. This could be done through encouraging joint research and campaign approaches between organisations as a way of generating shared agreement on the need to act. In order to be able to do this, this role should be seen as separate to promoting policy proposals as it is about securing consensus on the need for action on the policy direction, rather than additionally seeking policy outcomes. The examples in this paper reflect how when policy proposals are contentious and subject to political constraints, the debate about the need for change gets lost in the hot air of the public realm. In helping develop ownership of the case for action by both government and the public, it will be vital to not pre-empt the solutions that tackling climate change requires.

Secondly, the “broker” could also focus on developing a range of networks both within government and within the public realm to help disseminate information and encourage actors across society to travel the “journey” towards action on climate change. As expert “navigators” the Sustainable Development Commission would be well placed to help guide them through the debate and towards developing – and so owning – their own solutions. To build these relationships would require recognising a number of different internal and external audiences. The purpose of these and the value they would add are set out below.

Internal Audiences: developing the capacity of Government to act alongside not instead of consultants

This report shows clearly the difficulties in using external actors to lead engagement activities. This both inadvertently disempowers civil servants which can limit their willingness to use the outcomes of any process, and leads to a lack of institutional knowledge as to how and why engagement is a valuable activity. It is unlikely that developing an in-house capacity to develop and run large scale engagement activities is plausible. However, seeking to build into any network of interested parties a capacity to co-produce engagement work will help ensure the benefits of public participation are understood and sought from the start. This means developing partnerships with a broad range of consultants who can help all civil servants develop their own expertise on engagement, whether in thinking through methods or purpose, and so bridge the gap identified in **Engagement and the Civil Service** between those who do engagement and those who do policy.

Developing a large network of process advisors would also help to move those involved in using public engagement to address climate change away from becoming process focused because it would show there is no one solution. Indeed, this report has shown clearly the folly in seeking “one size fits all” models of public engagement. In seeking action on any policy issue which involves engaging with the public, it is important that those in government understand the need for a composite model approach which fits the process to people rather than trying to act the other way round. To do this requires knowledge of the different potential

ways to engage – be they on-line, grassroots, deliberative or social marketing campaigns – and their different uses. Making sure that those willing to engage the public on climate change are exposed to voices from across the range of different process providers, and then encouraging those within government to plan processes in partnership with them rather than outsource them, will help ensure that the process chosen reflects the needs of the policy area rather than the needs of the provider or the purchaser. The Sustainable Development Commission could therefore play a key role in facilitating both internal learning on how and why people will engage in climate change policy and the range of methods which could be used to assist this process. Making sure that this learning becomes part of the professional training of being a civil servant, rather than concentrated in particular individuals or roles, will also help spread the use of engagement activities as a way of securing policy outcomes.

Internal Relationships: facilitating collaboration not competition

Given the range of policy areas that climate change impacts on trying to secure action across all of them independently with each department could dilute the energy and attention that the Sustainable Development Commission can offer. Similarly, this report shows how simply promoting engagement as a way of dealing with climate change would be ineffective given the barriers to engagement that currently reside within government. Finally, it is also worth reflecting that from the perspective of citizens, being asked to look at the same issues by separate agencies even if for different policy outcomes is inefficient and likely to put off all but the most committed from participating.

In overcoming these barriers, encouraging policy and communications teams across government who share a concern about climate change to come together and plan how to interact with the public would be both resource and time efficient and effective in tackling the barriers between departments that prevent effective co-operation. Again, rather than pre-empting the outcomes of such collaboration, an “honest broker” could positioning itself as a facilitator of using resources effectively rather than promoting any one policy proposal or engagement activity for its own right. Consequently, this network would be best focused on being a forum for shared planning around the policy theme of tackling climate change – as opposed to engagement- helping to develop a joint approach to working with the public as a follow on from a joint approach to policymaking.

Such a forum could also act as a place to share information about events and activities taking place involving the public. This could help encourage civil servants, especially those in policy roles, to attend engagement activities and so develop a stronger sense of the value of working with the public when seeking to address climate change. In promoting this as a valuable experience in itself the Sustainable Development Commission could play a key role in how this opportunity is presented. Given the potential for this training element to be time consuming, the Sustainable Development Commission could play a key role in making this happen by using the research in this paper to press for experiential learning and committing to ensuring civil servants know of opportunities to attend engagement activities.

External Relationships: local outreach and connection

As an “honest broker” the Sustainable Development Commission could focus on helping Government understand how best to draw people into the debate regarding addressing climate change at both a local and a national level. There are lessons to be learned here from how the Make Poverty History campaign drew individuals and organisations into their work. It set a broad national framework of objectives, but was driven on the ground by a coalition of groups who each had a different angle on the debate. Thus, some people were first drawn in as members of Christian Aid, others through the fair trade movement and others from Jubilee 2000. Instead of trying to restrict each of these groups to one set of topics, Make Poverty History encouraged them to talk about the matters they were primarily interested in and then use this as a springboard to raise other aspects of the campaign. Activists on the ground then reached out to people using their local knowledge and own personal passion for a subject to bring energy and enthusiasm to their work. Learning from Make Poverty History, the Sustainable Development Commission could therefore also aim to assist the Government in becoming the navigators who guide people through policy and towards collaboration. This would involve helping them understand the purpose of connecting up local groups seeking to tackle climate change in different ways and helping them create ways of working which can plug into each other’s work as a way of encouraging cooperation rather than trying to create or promote a single model for action at a local level.

External Relationships: stakeholder alliances

Relationship building with stakeholders both within other departments and externally to government would not only facilitate practical resources. As the Make Poverty History example illustrates, alliances with stakeholders can transform the scope of engagement. Indeed, a social marketing approach may be an effective way of securing behavioural change for a single issue such as carbon trading or public transport use. Given the resources this would require, relationships developed through networking could help build a coalition between departments and with organisations seeking to act on climate change which can both fund and promote a simple ask for the public. Again the Sustainable Development Commission is well placed to broker such relationships not on policy proposals but through concern for the shared theme of climate change. To assist this, the Sustainable Development Commission should invest time in mapping out the key influential players within government and the “inner circle” that could help or hinder policy development. This process should take into account not only those visible in the field of climate change, but also those with strong influence amongst key stakeholder groups and the public policy field including those in think tanks, academic institutions and commentators in the media.

Networking stakeholders can also be a way of co-producing information, which an “honest broker” could then disseminate more widely, as discussed above. Furthermore, having developed the network approach outlined above, it could also

ultimately help engagement in the issue itself. This would bring the role of the Sustainable Development Commission itself to a wider audience and cementing its role as the “navigator” on both the policy issue of climate change and how best to engage the public.

In thinking about who to build relationships with, this report shows the value of moving outside of traditional audiences and the “comfort zone” of those who share the concerns of the Sustainable Development Commission. The report reveals the merits in encouraging those whose intervention in the climate change policymaking debates and processes would confound rather confirm expectations of decision makers. This means that in making the case for policy action, voices that are currently not vocal on this matter could transform the scope for change. Thus, building relationships with unexpected figures may reap substantial rewards: Jeremy Clarkson or the Chief Executive of an oil company could be much more powerful spokespeople than the environment minister or indeed an SDC Commissioner where climate change is concerned.

External Relationships: Using the Media

The report clearly identifies the critical role that the media play in telling the story of policy change. Hence, building media development work into any policy activity is critical not just for securing support for the outcomes but also for engaging the public. In telling the “story” of climate change as a way of shaping policy directions, there are lessons to be learned from the role not just of mainstream media outlets at both a local and national level but also working with non-news orientated publications such as women’s magazines and specialist interest periodicals. This in turn can help ensure issues and policy proposals move from being talked about – in political space – but also taken up in policy development.

Working with the media to help facilitate public engagement may also help overcome some of the problems associated with reaching a larger audience. Inevitably, resource considerations mean that formal public engagement processes cannot accommodate a substantial proportion of the public. Several of the examples presented in this report show how those who take part often find it a useful and informative experience but that this effect is limited to those able to directly participate. The continued emphasis on particular models as public engagement will only serve to heighten this problem.

In contrast, working through the media to promote awareness of both the issue and the process of consultation can help encourage a “second tier” of engagement which both supports the validity of any formal engagement process, and raises awareness about a subject among a larger proportion of the population. Make Poverty History used the media effectively to achieve a high level of public awareness about their activities, which helped to buttress the actual campaigning work and other activities undertaken done by a smaller section of the population. The Sustainable Development Commission may wish therefore to devote time and resources to developing relationships with the media to help tell the “story” of

climate change, and also with a view to using these to facilitate the “story” of the role of the public in addressing its causes.

Novices in need of navigation.....

This research seeks to inform the Sustainable Development Commission on the challenges facing those trying to make real the intent of government to put the public at the heart of policy making. The increasing political interest in engagement coupled with the value it can play particularly to tackling climate change, mean that there is a real opportunity to be grasped amongst both decision makers and the wider public. Yet the research reveals that at present for many in Government the jury is out as to whether public engagement is capable of delivering on this ambition. As one participant in **Engagement and the Civil Service** reflected “I think government are novices in all of this”. Thus, as this final discussion reflects, the research team argue that the Sustainable Development Commission could play a critical role as navigators themselves, using their professional knowledge to help all those concerned to grasp the opportunity engagement presents to tackle climate change.

Annex A: How has public engagement been used? Six Case Studies

Engagement and the Policy Making Process sets out the “inner circle” model for understanding how policy is made and three different stages of the policy making process. For each of the three stages set out, two different case studies were chosen to illustrate how the policy making process can be influenced by public interventions. These case studies were chosen to cover a variety of topics, political contexts and types of public engagement. These were as follows:

POLICY DIRECTION: Make Poverty History

GM Nation

POLICY DECISION: National Pensions Debate

Tomlinson Inquiry on Education/A-level policy

POLICY DELIVERY: Local Healthcare Reorganisation

New Islington Millennium Community

For each case study the following details are given:

- a) ***Rationale***: outlining why this particular case study has been chosen. This may be because it demonstrated unique achievements, process or political context, or because it provides a good contrast to one of the other case studies;
- b) ***Synopsis***: a synopsis of the context, objectives and process surrounding the engagement activities: why and how did the process happen?
- c) ***The role of the public***: the role of the public in the policy-making process;
- d) ***Other key actors***: Other key actors in the process including any role played by stakeholders, political representatives or the media.
- e) ***Policy outcomes and additional impacts***: the actual policy outcomes that can be associated with the issue whether these can be attributed to the public engagement activity and any additional activities or outcomes which influenced the policy context.
- f) ***Key points and conclusion***.

Policy direction 1: Make Poverty

- issue identified
- potential courses of action considered

a) Rationale

Make Poverty History has been chosen as a case study because it is a lesson in achieving mass mobilisation of an large population, and the use of this mobilisation to press for a change of political policy direction. It illustrates how the public engagement, enabled by social marketing techniques, can be extremely effective in channelling public opinion to affect policy. These include a robust media campaign, use of a strong communication brand through a “white band”, low barriers to entry for the public and the use of unexpected or high profile people to carry a message.

b) Synopsis

Background – why did this happen?

2005 had been identified by the UK government, media and NGOs as a key year for progressing UK national policy on international development because the UK took presidency of the EU and the G8, as well as heralding World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations and key UN meetings. This presented an opportunity for action to be taken on one of the largest global problems yet to be successfully tackled; poverty. In 2004 the Treasury held a conference bringing many development agencies together to discuss opportunities in this area for 2005. A shared understanding of the political and social space was developed, and what had started as an informal coalition of NGOs developed into a movement of 540 members broadly representative of UK civil society.

The organisation this eventually created was called Make Poverty History. The coalition was officially launched in January 2005 as part of a global network calling for a breakthrough on the issue of poverty in 2005 called the Global Campaign Against Poverty. The campaign that followed lead to an unprecedented increase in UK awareness on poverty and as a consequence mobilised large numbers of citizens to put pressure on politicians to act.

Objectives

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY had three broad objectives:

- Achieve policy change in 2005 to achieve more and better aid, debt relief and trade justice
- Create an unstoppable momentum for change in 2005
- Leave the public committed to further change beyond 2005

Engagement process

Because of the sheer scale of the campaign, and the nature of its objectives, public engagement was a central focus of the Make Poverty History strategy to affect public policy. In order to achieve the level of public mobilisation required to maximise political awareness and action, the Make Poverty History campaign had to be centred upon getting the UK public to hear, understand and act upon an agenda and then to act on this in lobbying political representatives and other members of the public. The M public mobilisation campaign was framed around a series of key events in 2005 and focused on getting a complex meaning to as many people in the UK as possible using a simple message. The message was symbolised by the white band, which people were encouraged to wear, wrap around buildings or use however they wished.

The Make Poverty History coalition took much inspiration from previous social movements such as CND and the anti-apartheid movement. Like these activities, Make Poverty History began as a set of fixed events focussed around key moments in 2005 and it became a tapestry of activities, taking on its own life as people hooked into the simplicity of action.

The budget for the movement began at £250,000, with a final total of £860,000 central expenditure. However, those organisations involved also covered various other costs of campaign materials etc along the way.

The key engagement milestones in the year of the MAKE POVERTY HISTORY movement were as follows:

- January: **Launch of campaign**
- 1st January: BBC1 programme **Vicar of Dibley** watched by 10 million
- 13th January: **Vicars' March** to Downing Street
- 3rd February: **Nelson Mandela** speaks in Trafalgar Square
- 11th March: Special films played on **Red Nose Day**
- 31st March: **Click Ad road block**
- 10th April: **Global Week of Action on Trade**. Wake Up to Trade Justice vigil attended by 25,000 people
- 24th April: **World Poverty Day** during General Election, speeches from all major party leaders
- 1st July: **White Band Day I**
- 2nd July: **Edinburgh Rally**. Attended by quarter of a million people. **Live8** concerts around the world
- 6-8th July: **G8 Summit**
- 10th September: **White Band Day II**. Activities at sporting events in UK
- 14th-16th September: **UN World Summit, New York**
- 2nd November: **Mass Lobby for Trade Justice**. 8,000 campaigners lobbied 375 MPs
- 10th December: **White Band Day III** 750,000 votes for Trade Justice handed in to Downing Street
- 13th-18th December: **WTO Ministerial Summit, Hong Kong**

c) The role of the public

The degree of public mobilisation provided an almost unstoppable momentum for the campaign, giving a national voice for change and allowing public consensus to be used as a strong policy lever. In this process, the almost viral spread of the white band amongst the public as a social marketing exercise was critical to the campaign. It created a real sense of being involved in an important alliance, and allowed people to immediately identify others involved in the campaign. The coalition treated the public as powerful individuals with important voices rather than a policy tool, which undoubtedly helped to foster a feeling of momentum and provide gravitas amongst participants.

Yet this campaign was not simply about raising awareness of the issue. It also explicitly engaged with the public on the need for them to take their concerns to

their political representatives. By creating a mass movement of individuals and groups and asking them to write or email political figures Make Poverty History translated the high level of public support for their policy positions into pressure for policy change. This then gave them powerful ammunition in dealing with the government to press the case for their concerns. Furthermore, this mass public engagement ensured the campaign also had support from politicians of all political persuasions to the point where not supporting it became a potential vote loser for all parties. Alongside the public engagement process the Make Poverty History coalition worked at lobbying government, having undertaken detailed policy research in advance. This two-pronged approach increased the exposure of those politicians to the policy ideas being put forward, who were targeted in turn by the demands of an increasingly mobilised UK public.

d) Other key actors

The Make Poverty History coalition had no central secretariat. Instead, a facilitative chair was appointed, with direction of the Assembly being led by a Coordination Team. The idea behind this was to strengthen existing networks and maximise the involvement of all coalition members. Three members of staff were formally employed by the coalition: an administrator, a media coordinator and a G8 event coordinator. The Assembly which included all members of the campaign was self-selected and its role was to advise and be consulted on strategy, act as a channel for raising queries and concerns, ratify overall strategy and major decisions, and elect the Coordination Team. The Coordination team oversaw various working groups as well as coordinating the strategy and inner workings of the Assembly.

Central to the whole process was a timely, effective and multi-pronged approach to using the UK media. A working group of media professionals taken from various groups within the coalition oversaw the media campaign. An evaluation of the Make Poverty History media campaign demonstrates just how much impact it had. Over 6,000 pieces of print and more than 60 hours of broadcast coverage were identified. A sample of 1,200 cuttings over a circulation of 50,000 generated over 1 billion opportunities to be seen, equivalent to an advertising value of £136.5 million. Working with media experts and using tabloids, broadsheets, regional press, faith publications and consumer titles meant that 72 per cent of adults in the UK were reached through these channels and that each of these 34 million people would have read about the campaign approximately 30 times. In terms of broadcast coverage, it is estimated that more than 3 days worth of coverage was generated, with almost 300 broadcast interviews featuring campaign spokespeople on 1st and 2nd July just before the G8 summit.

The use of unexpected parties including Republican Senators to carry the message was also extremely powerful in generating public interest. Furthermore, the politicians primed and targeted with the campaign message were of course instrumental in its final delivery at G8 and other events in 2005. Indeed, the Make

Poverty History model for using high profile celebrities has been taken on board by some particularly significant figures:

"The United Nations should recruit stars such as Bono and Bob Geldof to inject the kind of passion seen in the Make Poverty History campaign, according to one of the leading candidates to succeed Kofi Annan as its secretary general."

Observer, July 23 2006²⁵

e) Policy outcomes and additional impacts

Policy outcomes

The G8 Summit at Gleneagles agreed to increase aid to developing countries by £28.8 billion and to cancel the debt of the 18 poorest countries in Africa. There was also a commitment to work towards cutting trade subsidies and tariffs. It was also felt that Live8 had a big impact in terms of applying pressure on international governments. However, evaluation of the campaign suggested that whilst it supported real achievements in the areas of aid and debt, there was less success with their trade policy proposals other than the linkage of trade and development in the same sentence. At present it is not clear how many of the policy objectives set by the campaign will be achieved.

"Africa is all too easy to nudge into the background. A year ago, amid the excitement surrounding Live8, the Make Poverty History campaign and the Group of Eight leading industrial nations summit in Gleneagles, it was said that the hype could result in raising expectations about what could be done for the continent's development to over-optimistic and unrealistic levels."

The Guardian, July 19 2006²⁶

Additional impacts

An independent evaluation of Make Poverty History²⁷ showed that perhaps the greatest achievement of the campaign was the degree of public mobilisation. Indeed within six months of its launch Make Poverty History had achieved 88 per cent brand recognition in the UK, and 20 per cent of Britons said they had signed the petition. It was also apparent that awareness of some of the key messages of the Make Poverty History campaign -fair trade, drop the debt, trade justice and more and better aid- rose amongst the UK public by as much as 13 per cent within the first seven months of the campaign.

²⁵ <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/world/story/0,1826919,00.html>

²⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,1823638,00.html>

²⁷ Martin, A, Culey, C and Evans, S (2005) *Make Poverty History: 2005 Campaign Evaluation*. London: Firetail

f) Key points and conclusion

Whilst there is debate about how much of the Government's policy on international development was influenced by Make Poverty History there is universal acceptance that the public engagement it facilitated in the issue put the topic firmly on the political and policy agenda. Delivery of the policy promises has not yet been achieved, yet its role in influencing policy *direction* outcomes especially during the G8 was tangible. Other additional effects were a change in the political rhetoric of development and in the public awareness of the language of development - for example the recent use of G8 in Oxfam adverts.

The combination of strong policy research, lobbying and a well-executed media campaign cleared a pathway for the campaign message and developed the momentum for action. Taking a complex message and distilling it to a simple mechanism of delivery worked extremely well in this case, as did the presence of high-profile third party endorsers. Asking the public to interact with their political representatives ensured that concern about an issue was translated into concrete policy direction pressure to successful effect.

The Make Poverty History campaign closed off avenues for domestic opposition by effectively gaining a UK-wide consensus, and it also strengthened the UK's negotiating hand with other countries by lending the UK government the support and expectation of an entire nation. It is impossible to tell what would have happened without Make Poverty History, but those who worked on the movement believe it would have been a very different campaign if it had been with a government that had been more hostile to development. Those closest to the campaign are quite open about the impact of the public's role, saying that this campaign pushed government to go beyond what it would have done and that it strengthened resolve rather than changing public policy direction per se. What remains to be seen is the extent to which this year-long platform can be built upon for the long-term battle against poverty. Make Poverty History was nonetheless a good start, and provides a strong example of how mass public engagement over a period of time can be a powerful force for policy directions.

Policy direction 2: GM Nation

- issue identified
- potential courses of action considered

a) Rationale

GM Nation has been chosen as a case study to show that when the policy area in question is contentious public engagement needs to be planned carefully or else it can undermine both confidence in government and the policy area itself. Although the government made it clear that outcomes of the consultation events had been directly fed into GM policy, the process was seen as flawed and a missed opportunity. It is also an example of where other actors, especially those considered “inner circle” contributors such as scientists and stakeholders, were seen to be more influential even if this was not actually the case. As a consequence, the policy outcomes it created were overshadowed by the impact of the process on trust in the government’s ability and willingness to engage with the public.

b) Synopsis

Background – why did this happen?

The late nineties were an era of strong debate on the issue of genetically modified (GM) food and organisms in the UK. Controversy surrounded both the scientific and political aspects of GM, with government advisory bodies being accused of biased behaviour and concerns being raised over the ethical issues of the science behind GM. At the same time there was substantial media coverage of scientific advances including cloning and the production of “Dolly the Sheep” and the BSE crisis that fuelled public concern into the governance of such issues. In 2000 the government formed three new bodies, all of which had a remit that included aspects of GM to varying degrees:

- Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC)
- Food Standards Agency (FSA)
- Human Genetics Commission (HGC)

Importantly, the remit of all of these bodies included considering the wider socio-political issues associated with food and scientific innovation. The AEBC publication *Crops on Trial* in September 2001 took this into account, calling for a broader national debate on GM. The Government then accepted this advice and

announced a national debate as a way of engaging the UK public in the issue. In November 2002, GM Nation was born:

"The Government wants a genuinely open and balanced discussion on GM. There is clearly a wide range of views on this issue and we want to ensure all voices are heard."

Environment Secretary Margaret Beckett, 26 July 2002²⁸

Objectives

The stated aims of the GM Nation debate were twofold:

- Promote an innovative, effective and deliberative programme of debate on GM issues, framed by the public, against the background of the possible commercial production of GM crops in the UK and the options for possibly proceeding with this.
- Through the debate provide meaningful information to Government about the nature and spectrum of the public views, particularly at grassroots level, on the issue to inform decision-making.

The focus of the debate was very much on empowering the public to lead the discussion and enabling wide participation, not just involving the usual suspects. The AEBC were clear in their recommendations for a wider public debate that it should NOT require a simple yes or no decision. Instead it stated it should *"establish the nature and full spectrum of the public's views on GM and the possible commercialisation of GM crops, and any conditions it might want to impose on this"*²⁹.

Engagement process

The public debate was organised in three tiers:

- Tier 1: six national and regional events directly organised by the Steering Board. These involved a series of roundtable discussions based on the debate stimulus material.
- Tier 2: county-level and other large-scale meetings, set up in partnership with councils and other organisations. These varied more in their format; some involved experts, others included debates around specific motions.
- Tier 3: a toolkit for local events was produced, to be used by anyone who wished.

²⁸ GM Nation Press Release (available at www.gmsciencedebate.org.uk/background/pn260702.htm)

²⁹ Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC) (2001) *Crops on Trial*. London: AEBC

All participants across all tiers were asked to fill in a feedback form which included a chance to express views, as well as the 13 questions that came out of the foundation workshops. For example "I believe GM crops could help to provide cheaper food for consumers in the UK"; "I am concerned about the potential negative impacts of GM crops on the environment". Responses for all questions were to comprise of a choice between agree strongly, agree, don't know/unsure, disagree and disagree strongly. It was recognized that participants in the main debate were self-selecting and therefore not likely to be representative of the wider UK public. As a result two further activities were carried out:

- A **narrow-but-deep** study. This took a typical cross section of the wider population and exposed them to GM issues over a two-week period. The views of these 78 participants were tested at the start and finish of the two weeks.
- A random sample of the wider debate was checked for standardised responses. Although there were none, this obviously does not detract from the potentially biased nature of a self-selecting group with their own strong opinions.

Alongside the large number of meetings, the GM Nation website received 24,609 unique visitors, 60 per cent of whom submitted feedback forms. 1,200 letters or emails were also received, mostly from individual members of the public. Alongside the formal programme of debate, several other activities occurred in parallel. These were:

- A review of the science behind GM issues: first report published in late July 2003.
- A costs and benefits study of the growth of GM crops: report published in July 2003.
- Other activities carried out by the FSA (including a citizens' jury as well as initiatives to reach young people and consumers in low income groups).
- A series of Farm Scale Evaluations to test the potential environmental impacts of growing herbicide-resistant crops.

Critically, because of the timing of the science and economic strands, there was not enough time to feed these fully into the public debate itself.

c) The role of the public

Following the official letter of support from Margaret Beckett, the Secretary of State for the Environment at the time, in November 2002, the main debate itself ran from February to July 2003 and included approximately 600 meetings involving 37,000 people. Before February there was a planning lead-in organised by the Steering Group involving desk research, as well as the appointment of consultants to run a series of regional workshops in November 2002. These workshops were designed to allow a grassroots level understanding of the issues for debate and also to help the Steering Board design the main programme of engagement.

For what was presented as a public debate, the GM Nation process had very little true cross-sectional demographic involvement. The self-selecting nature of the main debate meant that average members of the public who may have no or little existing interest in the GM issue were not involved. The narrow but deep study helped to overcome this to a certain extent, but this was seen by many independent commentators such as too little, too late, as well as not being statistically robust³⁰. Despite all of the problems cited, a MORI opinion poll following the debate did actually show a broad mirroring of many of the GM Nation findings amongst the general public. However, poll also suggested that the

“...extent of outright opposition to GM food and crops amongst the British population is probably lower than indicated in many of the GM Nation Findings.”

University of East Anglia/MORI Survey, 2003³¹

d) Other key actors

The GM Nation debate was funded by the Office of Science and Technology (OST). A Steering Board for the debate was set up to ensure independence from Government; this comprised a number of people with different backgrounds and a range of views on GM. The steering board asked the OST for more money and time to run a robust process, but an evaluation of the process argued³² the debate was still not carried out in time to take into account the findings of the other parallel reviews, or perhaps over a long enough time period to ensure true cross-sectional public representation. Margaret Beckett was particularly supportive of the debate in public both before and afterwards, mentioning it several times in her subsequent policy statement in November 2004.

e) Policy outcomes and additional impacts

The Steering Board laid out four main indicators of success for the GM Nation debate in steering the policy direction of the UK Government which can be evaluated:

- The extent of **public awareness** of the programme, the science and related issues.

³⁰ For a critique of the GM Nation process, see for example Horlick Jones, T, et al (2004) *A Deliberative Future? An independent evaluation of the GM Nation Public Debate*, Norwich: University of East Anglia; Bruce, D (2004) *Lessons about Public Consultation from the UK GM Nation Debate*, Edinburgh: Society, Religion and Technology Project (SRTP) of the Church of Scotland

³¹ Conducted by MORI directly after the end of the formal GM Nation? public debate (19 July to 12 September 2003). A nationally representative quota sample of 1,363 people aged 15 years and older was interviewed face-to-face in their own homes in England, Scotland and Wales. All data were weighted to the known profile of the British population.

³² Horlick Jones et al (2004), op.cit.

The debate was criticised for not having enough time or funding to give it the publicity it would need in order to reach a truly representative cross-section of the UK public, including at grassroots level. The lack of results from the scientific and economic studies meant that there was no new information available to feed into the debate.

- The **views of participants** in the debate about what they felt should be the criteria for success both of particular events in which they participate and the programme as a whole.

Feedback forms were generally positive about the debate and the chance to express views on such a controversial issue. However, it would have been interesting to look at the views of non-participants as well e.g. had they heard about the debate, would they have taken part had they had known about it?

- The **views of informed commentators** - the extent to which they feel that the exercise has been credible and innovative, balanced, and has moved the debate beyond the polarisation that has so far characterised much of the discussion about GM crops. Also, their views on whether the report from the debate is sensitively drawn and provides an improvement on present understandings and characterisations of public views.

Those who had strong opposing views on GM and surrounding issues tended to agree with the outcomes and some did not pay too much attention to the process issues (e.g. Friends of the Earth; Genewatch; The Soil Association). However, independent evaluators tended to disregard the outcomes as not valid and focused on the process (e.g. EFRA Committee; UEA). The general view was therefore not a positive one.

- The extent to which the report from the debate could reasonably be said to have had an **impact on Government**. Was information about public views emerging from the debate taken into account in decision-making? Also, the extent to which Government views the debate as a model for future public engagement.

The extent to which the report from the debate could reasonably be said to have achieved this is debated, as some believe the policy direction of the UK Government on GM crops was already decided. Furthermore, the process may have had an additional unintended policy outcome because it was viewed by the Government as a model for future public engagement and how not to do it. The EFRA Committee report concludes:

"We trust that the Government will look seriously at the lessons to be learned from the conduct of the GM public debate. As we have made clear in this report, the main lesson is that wide-ranging consultative exercises such as the GM public

debate must be adequately resourced and must be given enough time to be conducted properly."

Conduct of the GM public debate, Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 2003³³

It was early on in the proceedings that the Steering Board flagged up the need for extra funding for the process, as well as for a longer timescale; both of these were granted. The initial budget allocated by the Office of Science and Technology (OST) was £250,000, but this was doubled when the steering board advised that the initial amount would be insufficient for an effective process. The findings of the public debate were published on 24 September 2003.

Following the debate, Secretary of State Margaret Beckett gave a statement on the Government's GM policy on 12 February 2004. The debate was one of the first points mentioned in her statement:

"The public dialogue reported general unease about GM crops and food and little support for early commercialisation of GM crops. People already engaged with the issues were generally much more hostile. Those not so engaged were more open-minded, anxious to know more, but still very cautious and it was suggested that as they learned more their hostility deepened."

Margaret Beckett, statement on GM policy, 12 February 2004³⁴

This stated view of the public was contrasted with findings from the economic study...

"The costs and benefits study concluded that the GM crops currently available offer only some small and limited benefits to UK farmers, but that future developments in GM crops could potentially offer benefits of greater value and significance even in the United Kingdom."

Margaret Beckett, statement on GM policy, 12 February 2004

...and the science review:

"The Science Review concluded that GM is not a single homogeneous technology and that applications should continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. It reaffirmed that there are some gaps in scientific knowledge and in particular that it is important that the regulatory system is kept under review so that it keeps pace with any new developments. But it concluded that there was no scientific case for ruling out all GM crops or products."

³³ House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (2003) *Conduct of the GM Public Debate*. London: The Stationery Office

³⁴ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/ministers/statements/mb040309.htm>

Taking these together, the Secretary of State outlined a precautionary, evidence-based approach, taking a case-by-case methodology for the future development of GM crops in the UK which was a component of all these different reports. She said that whilst there was no scientific case for a blanket approval of all the uses of GM, there was also no scientific case for a blanket ban on the use of genetic modification. A final reference and thanks to the public debate suggested that the Government had been influenced by participants and incorporated their views into policy.

However, key stakeholders debate the extent to which results from the GM Nation debate were actually fed into policy and how other “inner circle” actors were more influential. GeneWatch stated that the results of the debate were “robust and represent a valid and useful body of information to inform policy making”³⁵ but criticized subsequent GM policy for ignoring them, and for paying more attention to the Farm Scale Evaluations, and the science and economic reviews. The Science, Religion and Technology Project of the Church of Scotland agreed with the outcomes but argued that they were by no means robust.³⁶

f) Key points and conclusion

The outcomes of the GM Nation debate were fed into subsequent government policy on GM, but they were fed in alongside and separately to the scientific and economic evidence, giving participants little or no new evidence on which to base their opinions. This meant the government had to take into account all of the results from all of the studies and, some feel, the GM Nation debate was not taken properly into account in final policy.

Although the overall aim of public debate over such a controversial issue and the use of the narrow-but-deep study were generally applauded, the results were generally considered to be biased and lacking in true public engagement. It was also criticised for presenting the issue of GM in too simple a fashion, as a straightforward for or against; a choice which the AECB had advised the debate should *not* be about. Criticisms surrounded the methodology, short timescales and insufficient funding of the debate, not to mention the lack of available information from the concurrent economic and scientific strands of the debate. It is not possible to predict what the outcomes would have been had the GM Nation debate been given more time and resources in order to truly involve a larger representative cross section of the UK public. If the debate had been timed to take place the results of the other studies, the framing of the whole issue could have been very different.

³⁵ Mayer, S (2004) *Avoiding the difficult issues: A GeneWatch report on the Government's response to the 'GM Nation?' public debate*. Buxton: GeneWatch

³⁶ Bruce, D (2003) *Reflections on the GM Nation Debate*. Edinburgh: Society, Religion and Technology Project (SRTP), Church of Scotland

This is an unusual case study in that, whilst the outcomes of the debate may have been used to inform and influence Government direction policy, the process itself was deemed to be highly flawed. As a consequence it influenced policy but led to setbacks in public engagement in policy making because it damaged the trust of the public and stakeholders as to the motivations of the Government. If MAKE POVERTY HISTORY set the policy direction to be one of “move this forward and we the public will push and support you along the way”, then GM Nation could be said to have set a direction of “move this forward and we will obstruct and mistrust you at every step”.

Policy decision 1: National Pensions Debate

- decisions on action to take made
- decisions made public

a) Rationale

This case study has been chosen because it demonstrates the capacity for public engagement to improve and ultimately enable policy decision making. The process used revealed that public engagement could help support policy decisions seen to be difficult to make, and so overcome political concerns. It is also an example of topic on which public and stakeholder engagement were carried out simultaneously and to harmonious effect.

b) Synopsis

Background – why did this happen?

The UK population is moving increasingly towards becoming an aging population leading to concern that public provision for the elderly will be unsustainable in the future. As a result, worries about the future of the state pensions system had been developing for some years before an independent Pensions Commission was set up in December 2002 to review the long-term challenges for the system and to develop recommendations for reform.

In November 2005 the second report of the Pensions Commission, the Turner Report³⁷, was published, recommending a radical shake-up of the pensions system. The report criticised those who thought the problem of affording pensions could be “wished away” and gave a series of recommendations:

- A more generous, flat-rate universal pension paid to those who qualify on the grounds of residency in the UK, not on the grounds of national insurance contributions.
- Pensions to rise in line with earnings, not prices.
- Increase in state spending on pensions, from 6.2 per cent of GDP to nearer 8 per cent.
- Increase in the state retirement age from 65 to 68, to be introduced gradually over three decades, starting in 2020.

³⁷ Department for Work and Pensions (2005) *A New Pensions Settlement for the Twenty First Century: The Second Report of the Pensions Commission*. London: The Stationery Office

- Introduction of a national pensions saving scheme (NPSS), which would be offered through employers, and would automatically enrol workers unless they requested to opt out.

Given the potential effect of the recommendations on the entire UK population, the Turner Report paved the way for a large public consultation of the future of the UK pensions system: The National Pensions Debate. This also built upon existing research into the public's attitude to pensions. This pointed towards a lack of knowledge and understanding on the issue of pensions, as well as a reluctance to plan for retirement.

Objectives

The National Pensions Debate had the dual aims of raising awareness of the pension challenges facing society and understanding public views on the Pensions Commission's proposals for reform to the UK pension system.

Events had to both inform and seek views on policy proposals. Because of the complex and personal nature of pensions for many people, it was decided that a deliberative approach be taken to the public engagement process. A deliberative approach generally takes more time than other, more traditional methods as it allows participants to digest information and come to more informed conclusions. The issues were presented in the form of a series of choices or trade-offs which would be inevitable for the future of UK pensions policy.

Engagement process

Between 18th February and 28th March 2006, 6529 people contributed to the National Pensions Debate by taking part in an online debate, deliberative public events and devolved events with stakeholder groups. The process concluded with National Pensions Day, a large deliberative consultation event which was the largest to date in the UK. There was substantial media coverage of the process, as well as ministerial presence at the deliberative events.

National Pensions Day and regional events

Participants were actively recruited to fulfil a number of demographic and other criteria. This included a focus on traditionally hard-to-reach and seldom-heard groups³⁸, as well as ensuring that each group reflected the local demographics for each area. Local recruiters were enlisted and recruitment took place on the street or via door-to-door contact. Each participant received a personalised letter, signed by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions prior to their event. Where possible all attendees were called by the event organisers to encourage attendance and to verify key demographic details.

³⁸ The OLR's official report from the process does not define what is meant by "hard to reach" or "seldom heard" but states that participants were recruited to reflect the UK population in relation to various demographic criteria. See OLR (2006) *Department for Work and Pensions: National Pensions Day Final Report*, London: OLR

On the day, the process consisted of small and demographically mixed table groups each with a facilitator for their discussion about policy, as well as plenary sessions for information giving and voting. The information giving included video briefings from Adair Turner and interactive quizzes. Parts of the Turner Report proposals were explained in turn, then debated and voted upon, with results being available immediately. Ministers and members of the Pensions Commission were also present at each event to listen and to conclude proceedings. The satellite link-up on National Pensions Day allowed results and comments to be shared, so that a more in-depth picture could be developed throughout the day.

Online questionnaire

A questionnaire was also developed for the project. This was a self-selecting process, available to anyone with access to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) website. Publicity was given by national newspapers and via the local recruitment process.

Devolved listening exercises

A pensions debate resource pack was developed in order to allow stakeholders to run their own events. This could all be downloaded from the DWP website and feedback from these events was given electronically or by post. The organisations running these events had no restrictions on recruitment and could run the event for whoever they liked.

There was also an interesting comparison of attitudes taken from participants at the beginning and end of the regional events and National Pensions Day events. Before the process even started it was clear that this was an issue people felt strongly about: 93 per cent of participants felt pensions were a “quite important” or “very important” issue. Following the day’s events, 55 per cent of participants felt they knew “a lot” about pensions (compared to just 13 per cent at the start). In terms of solutions, at the end of the process participants agreed with the Turner Report that people would have to save more for their retirement (88 per cent), employers would have to contribute more to employees’ pensions (85 per cent), a greater share of taxes would have to be spent on pensions (80 per cent) and people would have to work for longer (57 per cent); these were all higher levels of agreement than had occurred at the beginning of the day.

The contrast of these results with those from the online debate showed online respondents to be more motivated overall (99 per cent considered pensions to be important) and a more informed group (58 per cent already felt they knew “a lot” about pensions). These participants also felt most strongly about saving more, followed by a greater share of taxes going to pensions, increasing average retirement age and pensioners becoming poorer compared with the rest of society.

c) The role of the public

The full programme of events for which public contributions were sought was as follows:

- Two day-long regional deliberative events.
- National Pensions Day, comprising of six simultaneous deliberative events, linked up by satellite and held at various locations around the UK.
- A self-completion questionnaire, available online and on paper.
- Devolved listening exercises, undertaken by stakeholder organisations.
- A “Citizens Panel” of twelve people was consulted throughout the event development process and used to “road-test” all materials and discussion guides.

Key to this process was the “framing” of the policy decisions on offer for the public. Members of the public were invited to take part in the regional and national debates, an idea similar to that of GM Nation, but in a very different process. Firstly, they were a cross-sectional representation of the general public. Secondly, they were presented with a complex issue through a series of rational and *necessary* choices – this presentation of trade-offs was crucial. The deliberative nature of the events gave time for the public to be educated, to discuss and to draw conclusions. Polling at the start and end of the events showed participants had been taken on a journey, had learned about the issues, and were able to give informed choices as to the future policies that would define the UK pensions system.

d) Other key actors

The process was funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. Adair Turner, Chair of the Pensions Commission, was a prominent figure throughout the debate, as was John Hutton, the Secretary for Work and Pensions. Turner boiled down a complex issue into a set of choices that individuals would have to make. Not only did this present the issue simply to a public audience, but also helped to build cross-party consensus on the issue.

The Chancellor Gordon Brown also appeared to play little role in the debate following his apparent misgivings³⁹. He was said to have expressed unhappiness at the idea of a higher state pensions linked to earnings and was reported to prefer a system with a more means-tested approach. The public debate was run by an external consultancy, who provided an independent approach to the handling of the process.

e) Policy outcomes and additional impacts

³⁹ Reported in The Guardian, 30 November 2005

The report from the National Pensions Debate was published in May 2006 and the Government developed proposals based upon the Turner Report and results from the debate, published in late May 2006. There then followed a further round of rather more standard consultation, as opposed to another large deliberative process, with approximately 350 responses. The Pensions Bill was finally introduced into parliament on 28th November 2006. Some of the key points in the Bill following National Pensions Debate are as follows:

- State retirement age to be increased to 68 to ensure changes are affordable.
- Restoring the link between earnings and state pensions.
- A fairer deal for women (simpler and fairer to build up a state pension).
- A "delivery authority" to set up a national saving scheme for delivering personal accounts.

It seems, therefore, that the Bill broadly reflects feedback from the National Pensions Debate; it has proceeded successfully so far and is now awaiting 2nd reading in the House of Lords. As well as success in contributing to radical changes in state pension policy, it is clear the deliberative process of the National Pensions Debate had an additional three further effects: an increase in national awareness of the importance of pensions and surrounding issues; an increase in understanding of some of the difficulties and processes involved in dealing with policy on an issue such as pensions; and an increased connection certainly between event attendees and the democratic processes of Government.

"Impressed that the Government generally cared enough to listen – almost like a referendum. Feel like it's a genuine effort to listen."

Belfast participant⁴⁰

"...there's also some evidence of people changing their behaviour in terms of being more active in thinking about how they're going to save for retirement, savings products are being taken out, and surveys of people say we're thinking more now about what we're going to do when they retire."

Interviewee 2 (National government)⁴¹

f) Key points and conclusion

The success of the National Pensions Debate may be attributed broadly to one theme: framing. Framing refers to the way in which those planning the event took account of three factors: the timely nature and national political and social context for the debate; the way the issues were presented to both participants and politicians; and the time and resources given to supporting the process.

⁴⁰ Opinion Leader Research (2006a) *National Pensions Debate Final Report*. London: OLR

⁴¹ Involve interview carried out in May 2007

The National Pensions Debate provided clear two-way benefit for participants and the government. The use of public engagement alongside stakeholder engagement was also powerful, as both groups came up with similar answers. This demonstrates that, given the right presentation, complex issues can be tackled by the public for the benefit of improved policy making because the proposals were seen to be more responsive to the public's needs. This case study highlights the importance of a clear government commitment not only to running a public engagement process, but doing so when the social and political space is primed, and when there is a real commitment to resource a robust process with visible follow-through in the policy process.

Policy decision 2: Working Group on 14-19 Reform

- decisions on action to take made

a) Rationale

The 14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform has been chosen as a case study regarding the policy decision making process as it offers an interesting comparison to the Turner Report process. In both cases an independent commission was set up to deal with a complex policy issue of national importance and high profile and to propose concrete proposals for action. Furthermore, both policy areas sought to engage with stakeholders and the public on the policy proposals considered. Yet the outcomes of the two processes were very different. This case study attempts to unravel why.

b) Synopsis

Background – why did this happen?

For many years there had been public concern and media reporting regarding the quality of secondary education in the UK. Furthermore, many stakeholders including teaching unions and universities were also calling for a radical shake-up. Given the Government's long-running focus on education, this also helped to create the political space for debate by making education a priority. In February 2002 a Green Paper entitled *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards* was published and put out for consultation⁴². The consultation ended in May 2002, and a subsequent report building on the original Green Paper was published. The Working Group (chaired by Mike Tomlinson) was set up alongside this in order to develop recommendations to feed into a White Paper; they published an interim report in January 2004, with final findings aimed for July 2004 and published in October 2004⁴³. The Government White Paper as a response to the Tomlinson Inquiry followed in 2005⁴⁴.

Objectives

The overall 14-19 reforms had three main elements:

⁴² Department for Education and Skills (2002) *14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards: analysis of responses to the main consultation document*. London: DfES

⁴³ Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004) *14-19: Curriculum and Qualifications Reform*. London: DfES (also referred to as the Tomlinson Inquiry)

⁴⁴ Department for Education and Skills (2005a) *14-19 Education and Skills - White Paper*. London: DfES

- raising attainment now;
- designing new curriculum and qualifications;
- and delivering on the ground.

“The 14-19 reforms will give all young people the opportunity to choose a mix of learning which motivates, interests and challenges them, and which gives them the knowledge, skills and attitude they need to succeed in education, work, and life.”

DfES website⁴⁵

Central to the Tomlinson Inquiry was the substitution of A-levels with a new Diploma-like system. This would then make A-levels and GCSEs part of a diploma framework as “components” but end their status as free-standing qualifications.

Engagement process

Although this case study is centred on the Tomlinson Inquiry, it is important to consider the process of consultation leading up to the development of the report and the factors which influenced the context in which the report was published.

The Green Paper: 14-19 – extending opportunities, raising standards

The consultation on the 2002 Green Paper was one of the most extensive ever carried out by DfES. It involved representatives from every secondary school and further education-sector college in England, who were brought together at fifty eight regional workshops that were managed jointly by LEAs and local LSCs. There were also additional events for a range of other stakeholders such as voluntary sector providers, youth services, higher education and employers. 2,000 written responses to the Green Paper were also received. A version of the Green Paper was also developed specifically for young people, to be discussed face to face informally using the Connexions Service. This led to 4,000 further responses.

Working Group on 14-19 Reform

The Working Group took responses from the 2002 process into account and undertook no large scale public debate itself, but rather focused on regular engagement with a broad range of key stakeholders. Over a period of two years, the group examined evidence, took advice and lobbied influential players such as teaching unions, politicians, industry and universities. Formal responses from key stakeholders were also submitted following publication of the interim and final report. The engagement the Working Group undertook was clearly different to the other case studies considered in this report, in that it was primarily stakeholder rather than public engagement.

⁴⁵ www.dfes.gov.uk

c) The role of the public

The general public were not a substantial part of the Tomlinson Working Group's activities. As a consequence there was no structured public debate as part of the overall process which may provide some clues to the eventual outcomes. Instead, the focus appeared to be on lobbying key players and involving stakeholders at every stage of developments.

d) Other key actors

The Green Paper consultation process and all other activities surrounding the 14-19 review were funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Subsequently, political actors such as the Prime Minister Tony Blair, the two Secretaries of State for Education, Charles Clarke, and, Ruth Kelly, and the Conservative Party all played key roles in the events that preceded and followed the publication of the report.

There were no clear objectives publicly laid out for the process of engaging stakeholders or the public in the development of the Tomlinson Inquiry, although ongoing engagement with key stakeholders was a central part of the Commission's evidence gathering process. As a consequence stakeholder engagement was a major part of the whole process – they were consulted at every step of the way. In particular, key stakeholders and the media played a big role in the aftermath of the report and subsequent White Paper. Stakeholders with strong views both for and against the proposals spoke out, and of indeed the slightly more negative stories on the handling of the whole process tended to be those picked up by the national press.

e) Policy outcomes and additional impacts

The outcomes

The original Green Paper consultation showed that consultees welcomed the idea of 14-19 reforms, particularly in providing more flexibility and a promotion of the vocational pathway. The idea of instilling a greater sense of ownership in young people was welcomed, as was the approach to having a narrower set of core key subjects. There were mixed views over proposals focused on more able students and on a plan to introduce an overarching award to recognize achievement by age 19, with most agreeing to the award in principle but having concerns over the proposed structure.

The responses to the Tomlinson Inquiry were initially mixed. It is important to note the Working Group produced a broad consensus on a radical shake-up of the UK secondary education examination system amongst those stakeholders who took part. The proposal to phase out GCSEs and A-levels over a ten year period and to replace them with one overarching diploma secured cross-party support at Westminster.

"The Tomlinson proposals represent a welcome opportunity to address the needs of all young people – not just an elite few."

Phil Willis MP, Liberal Democrat education spokesperson, October 2004⁴⁶

Charles Clarke, the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills also responded very positively:

"I welcome the Working Group's report and commend it wholeheartedly to the House."

Charles Clarke, October 2004⁴⁷

However, Tony Blair and the then Schools Minister David Miliband immediately responded to the Report by saying that A-levels would not be scrapped, but "enriched". This in turn caused great confusion and led to the suggestion that there may be a policy "u-turn" by the Government. A White Paper was published in February 2005 as a response to the Tomlinson Inquiry under a new Secretary of State, Ruth Kelly. The government chose to cherry pick which recommendations should be fed into the White Paper, an action which Tomlinson himself had strongly wanted them to avoid. Of note was the decision to introduce a new diploma for a limited number of largely vocational subjects whilst keeping the existing GCSE and A-level structure in place.

The response

Teachers and college heads immediately expressed disappointment. Some had originally called even the Tomlinson Commission's report not radical enough. For them it was seen as "*cowardly*"⁴⁸ and "*a wasted opportunity*"⁴⁹. Mike Tomlinson also publicly expressed disappointment at the contents of the White Paper:

"While I welcome a number of the proposals contained in the White Paper, and believe the priorities identified are the correct ones, I remain disappointed that at this time the government has decided not to implement the proposals in full."

Mike Tomlinson, February 2005⁵⁰

Some believe that this was a clear case of "*electoral tactics [taking] precedence over educational logic*"⁵¹. When the Working Group on 14-19 Reform was formally

⁴⁶ <http://www.epolitix.com/EN/ForumBriefs/200410/a19059ac-ac35-44fc-aa4f-8fc4ef0a3b26.htm>

⁴⁷ <http://www.epolitix.com/EN/ForumBriefs/200410/a19059ac-ac35-44fc-aa4f-8fc4ef0a3b26.htm>

⁴⁸ Paul Mackney, general secretary of the lecturers' union Natfhe, February 2005

⁴⁹ Chief executive of the Association of Colleges, John Brennan, February 2005

⁵⁰ <http://education.guardian.co.uk/1419education/story/0,1423733,00.html>

⁵¹ John Dunford, general secretary of Secondary Heads Association, February 2005

put together it was asked by the Education Secretary at the time, Charles Clarke, to develop a "*unified framework of qualifications*". However, during the eighteen months of work undertaken by the Commission, controversy had arisen over the speedy introduction of AS-levels and, despite initial findings in the Commission's interim report, Tomlinson was not warned that a radical reform might not be as welcomed by government as was first expected. This change in the political landscape surrounding the 14-19 reforms was heightened by the forthcoming general election. In particular, opinion polls suggested Labour's popularity was falling, and the Conservative Party promised to "save" A-levels during the electoral campaign. The term "*A-level gold standard*" was coined by the media, making the disposal of the traditional A-level system increasingly politically unpopular.

There then followed a parliamentary reshuffle following the resignation of David Blunkett, which left Tomlinson Inquiry reporting to a new ministerial team with Ruth Kelly as the new Secretary of State. Despite support for radical reforms from many key stakeholder groups, on the day the report was released the Prime Minister announced that A-levels were "here to stay"⁵². It was, in the end, a risk that neither Kelly nor the Government were willing to take, a move which echoed that of the Thatcher government in response to the Higginson Report almost 20 years previously.

f) Key points and conclusion

Despite a thorough and diligent process undertaken by the Tomlinson Working Group, and a large and innovative stakeholder and public engagement process at the initial Green Paper stage, it is arguable the changes in the political context in which the policy proposals were made meant reform was unpalatable to the Government.

For the purposes of this research it is interesting to consider what could have happened had there been a high profile public debate surrounding the Tomlinson Inquiry, perhaps similar to that around the National Pensions Debate? It is of course impossible to say exactly, but assuming that the public would have been supportive of reform it could be argued that the Government would have been able to implement the policy decisions suggested in order to show they were listening to public opinion.

⁵² Reported in The Guardian, 19 October 2004

Policy implementation 1: Local healthcare

- reform process introduced
- political will fortified
- response generated

a) Rationale

This case study looks at the policy context of the future provision of healthcare services. In doing so, it looks at how the evidence gathered during the “Your Health, Your Care, Your Say” (YCYHYS) national engagement exercise can be seen to be implemented in the provision of local healthcare. This case study was chosen because it demonstrates how a lack of consistency in following through from national policy direction through to local delivery makes any public engagement activity, no matter how well received by participants and politicians, meaningless. It shows the problems that arise when different aspects of services do not work together. Whilst policy makers may be versed in the different responsibilities associated with institutions at either a national, regional or local level, the public see only the issue in question – in this instance healthcare. This resulted in a mismatch between efforts to engage them in policy and their experience of the same topic on the ground. In addition, it illustrates the importance of taking into account variables that may exist at both a local and national level when undertaking large-scale public engagement on any policy area.

b) Synopsis

Background – why did this happen?

YHYCYS was one of two consultations carried out by the Department of Health in 2005, alongside the “Independence, Wellbeing and Choice” consultation on adult social care. The outcomes from these two consultations would go on to form the White Paper *Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services*. Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Health expressed open support for new ways of engaging the public

“Public engagement can play a central role in re-invigorating our democracy and in delivering better services for the communities ...We need to take democracy beyond the ballot box ... give people the chance to engage with each other – users, people working in services, pressure groups with diametrically opposing points of view, policy-makers and Ministers themselves – in working through the problems and coming up with the best possible solutions together ...Effective public engagement can empower and liberate people to take greater responsibility for their lives. In this sense, it is in itself good for health.”

To support this intent an external consultancy was commissioned to undertake one of the largest research-based listening exercises ever to occur in England. The YHYCYS White Paper listening exercise took place between 14th September and 4th November 2005.

At the same time as the YHYCYS initiative, there was also a separate consultation being undertaken within the healthcare sector regarding the provision of services. This involved the restructuring of Primary Care Trusts and involved many of the same organizations and same issues as the YHYCYS exercise. This concern to restructure services was taking place against a backdrop of growing concern about the financial health of the NHS. In particular it became public knowledge that many local hospitals were struggling with funding issues. An example of this was Whipps Cross University Hospital in East London:

"Whipps Cross University Hospital Trust may have to cut back on new buildings, equipment and repairs to balance its budget. At the end of June the trust was overspent £6.19 million on capital projects and £1.5 million on income and outgoings. Financial director Brendan Sullivan told the trust board at its August meeting that in the worst case scenario, there was a risk that it could be £9 million in debt by the end of the financial year in April 2006."

Waltham Forest Guardian 4 September 2005⁵⁴

Objectives

The aim of YHYCYS was to ensure that the public, especially "seldom heard" groups, had an active involvement in deliberative debates on contentious issues about the future of healthcare provision in Britain. This included the issue of "trading off" public investment in different types of health and social care services. The listening exercise was also intended to create a high public profile in order to encourage wide involvement of the public and of stakeholders. Beneath the overall aim of the exercise sat three stated objectives including a commitment to public engagement in the policy making process:

- For the public, providers of care and Government to work in partnership to determine policy priorities and design new approaches to future care.
- To increase levels of public engagement in the policy decision making process.
- To produce a public debate visible at local and national levels around the future of personalized and community centred care.

⁵³ http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/News/Speeches/Speecheslist/DH_4114050

⁵⁴ http://www.guardian-series.co.uk/search/display.var.626777.0.whipps_runs_out_of_funds.php

The official evaluation of the YHYCYS process suggests an additional objective for the whole exercise: *“It was felt it would make some contribution to enhancing trust in Government, by reinvigorating public debate, and lead to better public service provision, by addressing the needs and concerns of service users and providers”*⁵⁵. The process as a whole was therefore seen as a way of setting policy direction and also improving policy implementation by enabling those charged with delivery to better understand the public’s priorities.

Policy objectives

The publication of a single White Paper based upon the outcomes of the two consultations was announced in July 2005 by Liam Byrne. The Paper would *“recognise how NHS and social care services work together and identify how the delivery of these services could adapt to provide individuals with the health and social care services they need closer to their homes”*⁵⁶.

Engagement process

The YHYCYS exercise enabled the public to speak directly to key decision makers such as ministers, practitioners such as healthcare professionals and a wide mix of other members of the public about how local services could be improved. The debate involved over 42,866 people using the following methods:

- A self-completed online questionnaire (29,808 people)
- Magazine surveys (3,358 people)
- Local listening exercises using a toolkit for assistance (8,460 people)
- Deliberative regional events (254 people)
- National citizens’ summit (986 people)

The local, regional and national participants were all given background information and evidence to inform their discussions. This included policy options for improvement and trade offs that needed to be considered. Polling on key questions took place throughout the process. Both the four regional events and the national events involved randomly selected participants from each region or from the country as a whole. The national summit focused on particular issues that had arisen from the questionnaire responses and from earlier events.

Alongside the input from the general public outlined above there were also three other activities involved in the overall process: A Citizens Advisory Panel made up of ten demographically representative members of the public; a set of five policy Task Forces involving approximately 60 stakeholder organisations and ad hoc contributions from 86 other stakeholders; and a Phonebus Survey which was carried out independently by Taylor Nelson before and after the national summit in order to evaluate public awareness of the debate.

⁵⁵ Warburton, D (2006) *Evaluation of Your Health, Your Care, Your Say*. Brighton: Shared Practice

⁵⁶

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/Organisationpolicy/Modernisation/Ourhealthourcareoursay/DH_072550

The YHYCYS exercise had a large budget and a short timescale for such a big undertaking⁵⁷. Lack of time may have provided a feeling of energy and urgency, but it also limited the ability of the process in some areas, for example, sharing feedback, local publicity, depth of debate and time to discuss trade offs and resource constraints.

c) The role of the public

The public were the focus of both the YHYCYS activities as already described. In addition, within the broader context of policy making around healthcare they were also key to many of the often localised campaigns regarding service provision which sprang up in response to the proposals made about healthcare, setting up vocal groups to oppose any potential closures or restructuring processes. These were grassroots led organisations rather than organised by any one central campaign group, and in some instances supported by local and national political representatives from all political parties. For example, in the case of Whipps Cross, the local labour MP and councillors set up the “I Love Whipps Cross” campaign⁵⁸ in direct opposition to what could soon become part of Government policy.

d) Other key actors

As stated already, the media have played a substantial role in this issue, with the plights of individual hospitals being capitalised upon to produce powerful stories. The Department of Health, whilst running a “good” process on the long term future of healthcare services, did not develop local communications and follow-up activities so as a result Primary Care Trusts were not seen to be part of the national engagement process or influenced by its outcomes. Whilst the Secretary of State Patricia Hewitt was a huge enthusiast for the process of engaging with the public on healthcare, she has subsequently had to resort to a more defensive position, moving from proactive engagement with the public to “fire fighting” concerns about the future of the NHS itself raised by both political opposition and the media. Perhaps more of a surprise has been the involvement of high profile ministers such as Hazel Blears in protests against policy-led hospital closures in their own constituencies⁵⁹, leading to mixed messages over policy implementation and motives. As the Whipps Cross case reflects, this pattern has been repeated across the country showing how those who would traditionally be expected to promote Government policy did not feel ownership over the proposals being implemented.

e) Policy outcomes and additional impacts

⁵⁷ Warburton, D (2006) op.cit. (exact details of budget and timescale unknown)

⁵⁸ www.ilovewhippscross.co.uk

⁵⁹ Reported in the Telegraph, 29 December 2006

The YHYCYS debate involved a diverse range of people, including NHS patients, social care service users, and the wider public, which in turn included many seldom heard groups. The feedback from participants was largely positive but at times sceptical. People seemed to think that similar events in the future were a good idea, and that the events had been run very well. They were, however, doubtful about the degree of real influence that these kinds of events would have over government decision making. There was a desire for a clear feedback loop to be established. In terms of policy outcomes, participants stressed a concern to have locally provided healthcare services and to be involved in decisions about their future. The White Paper was published in January 2006. Proposals included some ideas taken almost directly from the outcomes of the YHYCYS exercise:

- change the way these services are provided in communities and make them as flexible as possible.
- provide a more personal service that is tailored to the specific health or social care needs of individuals.
- give patients and service users more control over the treatment they receive.
- work with health and social care professionals and services to get the most appropriate treatment or care for their needs.

It appears that initially the engagement process was successful in terms of contributing to and influencing Government policy implementation. However, in 2006, stories about the restructuring of local health services to address budget deficits were a high priority in the media and showed little reference to the priorities set by the public in the YHYCYS activities:

"The closure of accident and emergency services at some hospitals is in the interests of patients, the Government said yesterday. Presenting them as part of a plan to create "super-A&Es" to deal with heart attacks, strokes, and aortic aneurysms, Patricia Hewitt, the Health Secretary, sought to halt a tide of opposition to the closures."

The Times, 6 December 2006⁶⁰

The Department of Health commissioned a follow-up exercise "Our health, our care, our say – one year on". Eighty four randomly selected participants from the original deliberative events were brought together in March 2007 to review progress on White Paper implementation. Outcomes were mixed:

"...the participants were asked about their awareness of any changes or initiatives in their area. Their awareness and experience of change was mixed and indicated considerable variation between areas."

Our health, our care, our say – one year on, OLR⁶¹

⁶⁰ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article661196.ece>

It appears that the problem is not the issue of more and better services, but the lack of consistency in policy application in healthcare as a whole. Whilst the public view healthcare as a singular topic, the policy decision making process is segmented by divisions between regional and national service responsibilities as well as the split between primary and secondary healthcare provision. As a consequence, discussions over the reorganisation of healthcare services and indeed funding priorities for healthcare appear not to be connected to the outcomes of the YHYCYS public engagement process on what the priorities for British healthcare should be in the future. In the example of Whipps Cross hospital which reflects many of the issues discussed in the YHYCYS process, a further consultation as part of the "Fit for the Future" project has now been put back from April 2007 to October 2007 in response to the public campaign over a perceived threat to close the hospital itself. Critically, this process is being overseen by regional rather than national healthcare services, so exacerbating the sense of disconnection between policy implementation on the ground within the NHS and any attempts to engage the public in healthcare service decision making.

f) Key points and conclusion

This case study illustrates a public engagement process which appears detached from the wider policy making context to its detriment. As a result its ability to assist in policy implementation has been damaged. This shows that if policy implementation is not viewed as fair, consistent and meeting expectations then the implication for the public and key stakeholders is that expectations were set wrongly in the first place. This is especially important where other issues e.g. local healthcare funding issues in this case could potentially cloud the perceived validity of a process. Although the YHYCYS process was undoubtedly thorough and broad reaching, issues arise in terms of timescales and participant follow-up. Whilst results were clearly fed into the subsequent White Paper, there appears to be no further sharing of learning within healthcare services about the public's views.

Thus, there was a lack of joined up thinking when it came to linking the YHYCYS exercise with the simultaneous PCT restructuring consultation. Little effort appears to have been made to consider how findings could be shared between the two processes, or what implications one might have on the other. For instance, considering the views expressed in the YHYCYS event, it could be argued that the Government could have predicted the response of local communities to the restructuring proposals. This might have encouraged those working on the proposals to engage more thoroughly with local communities, or seek to link their consultation process to the national policy debate, which could have potentially deterred some of the controversies that followed.

This demonstrates the importance of context and framing when carrying out any kind of public debate – if the context of financial difficulties and potential trade-offs

⁶¹ Opinion Leader Research (2007) *Our health, our care, our say – one year on: Research Report*. London: OLR

had been taken into account more explicitly within in the YHYCYS process, those charged with this process may have had more “ammunition” to show the value and public support for restructuring. It is possible that this in turn would have mitigated some of the controversy, particularly in the national press, over the Government’s motives for restructuring although clearly concerns about the financial health of the NHS also inflamed the debate. This also shows the importance of clear local and national communication surrounding a policy issue of such national importance. Without clear communication and framing, the public can easily turn from a valuable resource into a powerful opponent, aided by the media.

Policy implementation 2: Urban Regeneration

- reform process introduced
- political will fortified
- response generated

a) Rationale

This case study has been chosen as an example of how in the implementation of a national policy objective- in this case urban regeneration - local-level engagement throughout a process of delivery to ensure effective policy outcomes. This example also shows it is easier to illustrate and indeed experience the benefits of public engagement in policy at a local level and that both practical actions and an ethos of engagement can aid smooth project delivery and empower local people. Anecdotal evidence shows working in this way has already created additional benefits for the locality and the regeneration policy agenda.

b) Synopsis

Background – why did this happen?

In 2002 the Ancoats area of East Manchester was identified as the site for the third Millennium Community. The English Partnerships and Communities and Local Government (CLG) Millennium Communities programme was designed to create seven exemplar sustainable communities across the UK, with good transport links, shops and community facilities as a priority. The programme ethos is to provide a *"good range of high quality and innovative homes to facilitate an environmentally friendly lifestyle"*⁶².

The £250 million New Islington Millennium Community development comprises a 12.5-hectare site, which includes the former Cardroom Estate. The estate was notorious for high crime levels and social deprivation, and at the time the site was identified for development only half of the 204 homes were occupied. The Millennium Communities involvement with this part of Manchester came alongside an injection of £125 million funding from the Government in 2003 to regenerate large areas of the North of England, as well as a drive by the New East Manchester agency to double the population from 30,000 to 60,000 within 10 years. As the New Islington project is ongoing, it is estimated that the development will be completely finished

⁶² www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/millcomms.htm

around 2012; this case study examines the process up to the time of writing and looks at any initial outcomes.

Objectives

The vision for the New Islington development was originally stated as the reinvention of "*the previously neglected and rundown estate with cutting-edge architecture, new waterways and new housing.*" This was to include up to 1,734 new homes including affordable housing, commercial space for new shops, pubs, restaurants, cafes, bars and a number of facilities, including a new canal and water park, a primary school and a state-of-the-art primary health clinic.

Beyond the physical rebuild of the locality, there was also a desire by all involved to rejuvenate the social aspects of life in East Manchester and improve the cohesion of the community. Urban Splash, the property firm chosen as lead developer for the New Islington development, recognised that early and consistent public involvement would be vital to the project's success.

Engagement process

The key elements running through the whole engagement process are the early involvement of residents, the accepted validity of their input, the ease of entry to engagement, the innovative use of techniques e.g. competitions, websites etc, and the consistency of engagement where by both developers and architects engaged with local residents.

Some of the main points in the public engagement process for this project so far are outlined below:

- Key stakeholder working group set up for the Cardroom Estate development. (early 2002)
- 100 experts met in the city to hear the latest ideas for the site and offer their support to Urban Splash. (April 2003)
- Whole community invited to comment on the development framework for New Islington.
- Community was then invited to choose the architects for each plot.
- Successful architects worked with the local community in order to provide a mix of housing tailored to community aspirations and needs.
- Existing members of the community invited to choose their new properties before the development is advertised more widely.
- Urban Splash held regular public meetings in the Cardroom Estate pub, as well as visiting non-attendees door to door.
- Urban Splash hosted a number of street parties and other events to encourage members of the new and existing community to get to know each other.
- Urban Splash hosts websites designed to be used by local residents to advertise clubs, services and events, to facilitate community cohesion.
- Various competitions, e.g. name the dinosaur hedge competition for kids.

c) The role of the public

Engagement with local residents is a key part of this ongoing process, as they are the people directly affected by the project and can ultimately determine the success or failure of the scheme. Consequently, local residents are treated as key decision-makers and given an active role in shaping how the New Islington development will look. As the details of the engagement process show, the opportunity to contribute to policy delivery has been substantial and varied for residents and as a consequence there has been a high level of participation⁶³ this

⁶³ Anecdotal evidence only, although Urban Splash visited the house of every resident who didn't attend the regular public meetings .

means that for all those involved in the process, the added value of engaging the public is clear which has further increased support for working in this way.

d) Other key actors

The New Islington project was backed by a range of organisations, consisting of regional funding bodies, central government and the English Partnerships Millennium Communities initiative.

Key partners included the lead developer (Urban Splash), the preferred housing association partner (Manchester Methodist Housing Group) and the lead planners (Alsop Architects). The partners also worked with Manchester City Council, English Partnerships, New East Manchester Ltd and Ancoats Urban Village Company to form the plans for the New Islington development.

e) Policy outcomes and additional impacts

So far the New Islington development is proceeding according to plan. Residents moved in early 2006 to some of the twenty three first houses on the site. Existing residents are guaranteed a house in their old neighbourhood and can stay where they are until their new house is ready if they so wish.

The reported feeling on New Islington from outside of East Manchester so far appears to be broadly positive⁶⁴. This includes support for the innovative architecture and the environmental and social credentials of the development. There has been some criticism for a shortcoming of social housing and concerns that an emphasis on security may lessen the community spirit that the developers are so keen to preserve. However, generally feedback is that the project is on track to deliver. Longer-term outcomes remain to be seen.

The feedback from existing residents is clear the development is a constructive process but that it will not necessarily solve all of the existing problems in the area. However, those who are staying tend to like the design of their new houses and feel at home there, which is considered to be because they had a large input into choosing the architects and developing the plans.

"They listened. They really listened to what we wanted. And we just liked them as people."

Cardroom resident, April 2007

⁶⁴ Various press sources, and Manchester Methodist Housing Association Annual Report 2006

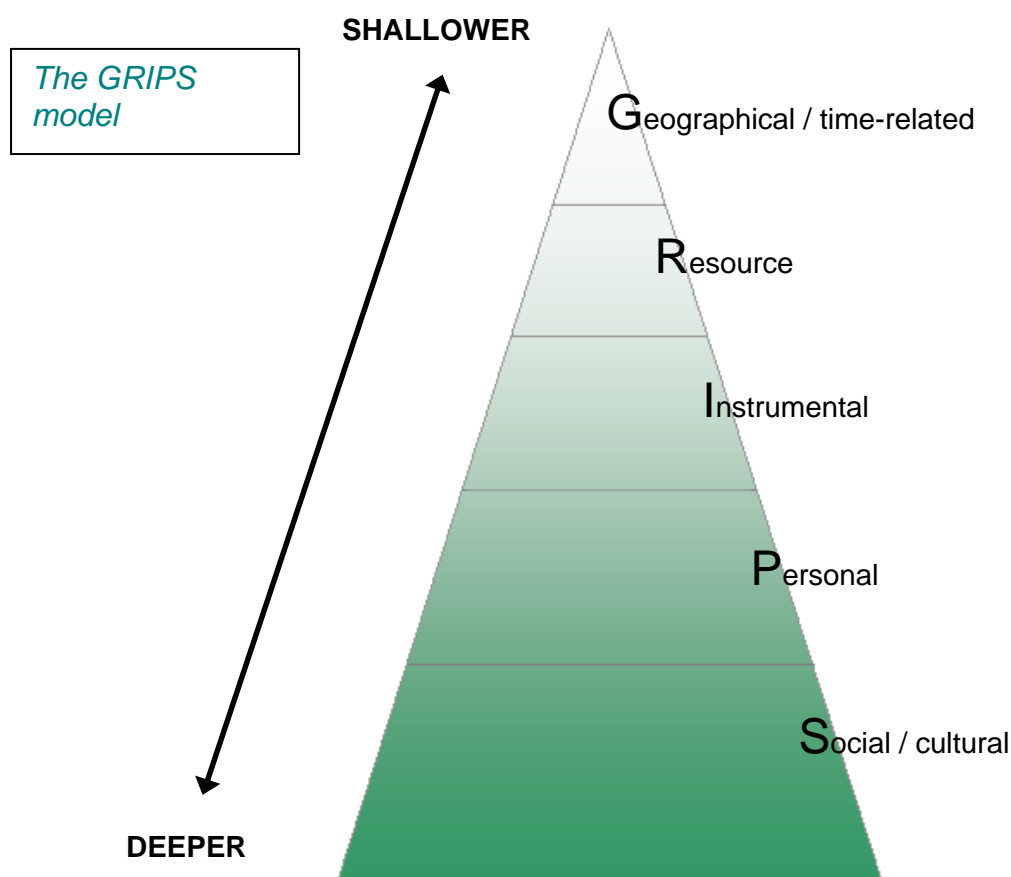
f) Key points and conclusion

The public engagement surrounding the New Islington development sets a precedent for similar future initiatives. It shows how public engagement in policy implementation, in this case around regeneration objectives, can deliver benefits that are not achievable through policy directive alone. These include informed planning for the development, social and community cohesion and widespread support for the changes proposed. These benefits to policy are delivered because developers and architects adhere to the same principles of talking and listening to people. The views of the general public are gathered from their doorsteps and are given true validity in that they have noticeable influence over proceedings. This shows how attention to local detail is also a key success factor. In the short term, the process of engaging effectively with the public has supported the policy framework and objectives for this development. However, it should be noted that at present the long-term tangible and intangible effects remain to be proven.

Annex B: The GRIPS Model

The GRIPS model is a way of unravelling why a process of engagement may or may not have been successful in its aims, in this case in terms of contributing to effective policy. The framework has been laid over each of the main case studies in order to pull apart the main enablers (foundations for success) and barriers (blockers to success).

It can be best represented as a pyramid. The deeper, more entrenched barriers or enablers are the social and cultural factors. Many issues (for example, lack of resources or logistical issues) may have deeper social roots and contexts (for example lack of managerial support for the project, organisational culture, etc) and some aspects will overlap. It should be noted that the framework does not just apply to the physical process elements of an engagement process, but also to the wider contexts in which the process is taking place.



The GRIPS table

Laid out as a table, the GRIPS model shows how the contributing factors of why, who, what, how, where and when all contribute to the overall degree to which an engagement process is successful in contributing to effective policy-making.

<i>Enabler or barrier type</i>	G eographical and time-related	R esource	I nstrumental	P ersonal	S ocial and cultural
<i>Driver</i>	WHERE & WHEN	HOW	WHAT	WHO	WHY (or WHY NOT)
<i>Relates to...</i>	Physical elements, timing	Resources required (not including participants)	Results, measurement, mechanisms	Individual participants involved	Context, rationale and common understanding underpinning the process
<i>What does success look like when this factor is an enabler, not a barrier?</i>	Participants are brought together at a suitable place and reached successfully (e.g. with publicity) for the duration of a well-coordinated engagement process, in a timely manner.	The supply of resources to successfully deliver the engagement process and to see through its outcomes is secured and maintained	The process successfully and demonstrably meets its objectives and delivers its desired outcomes under the current and/or future circumstances	The right range of individuals with suitable skills, knowledge, power, accountability and motivation are involved in the process	The political/social context provides opportunities for opening up engagement. The organisations or individuals involved are receptive to the process; they possess commonly understood and accepted expectations regarding the objectives and possible outcomes.

Bearing in mind our pyramid model, moving towards the right of the table the issues involved become more complex. In many cases the root causes of success, or lack of success, will sit towards the right of the table. The right hand side of the table (personal and social/cultural elements) is also opened up further in **Engagement and**

the Civil Service. Below each enabler or barrier type is illustrated with an example from the six case studies.

Geographical and time related: Local healthcare reorganisation

Enablers

- A short timescale created a feeling of excitement and pace.
- Deliberative events targeted a representative demographic to ensure valid public representation.

Barriers

- The short timescale pressurised some parts of the process, limited time for debate and for consideration of resource constraints/trade-offs and hampered partnership developments.
- 'Your Health, Your Care Your Say' (YHYCYS) occurred at the same time as a separate consultation on restructuring Primary Care Trusts. This not only involved many of the same stakeholders (therefore limiting the time they could put into the YHYCYS process) but also provided potentially confounding factors to the outcome of the YHYCYS process.
- Links between devolved events and other events were not as strong as first hoped, largely because of the timing issues.
- There has been a lack of consistent policy application, or at least a lack of consistent local communication about the rationale behind local policy application.

Resource: Tomlinson Commission

Enablers

- The initial level of resource and support given to the 14-19 process was sizeable.

Barriers

- The 14-19 structure that has come out of the 2005 White Paper has raised concerns about future resourcing in order to maintain and develop those aspects of the Tomlinson Report that have been taken on board.

Instrumental: Make Poverty History

Enablers

- The campaign took a complex message, distilled and delivered it in a simple way.
- The size and breadth of the coalition increased avenues and networks through which the campaign messages could be delivered.
- The media and communications strategy was well coordinated and highly successful, using a sophisticated portfolio of mechanisms to maximize breadth of reach.
- The campaign message typically reached the public through already popular mechanisms, e.g. music, celebrities, media.
- The mass communications were supported by strong policy research and lobbying.

Barriers

- Some messages from the coalition, e.g. in terms of political positioning, were unclear.
- Some critics felt that the campaign message was too simple and didn't actually educate the public in enough detail.

Personal: National Pensions Debate

Enablers

- Because of the potential implications for the whole of the UK population, a demographically representative sample was sought. However, this was done alongside a self-selecting group to allow those with strong views to also get their points across. The similarities between the two groups added strength to the outcomes of the debate.
- The nature of events allowed participants to feel truly engaged and valued. Many participants also drew value from the process in terms of their own learning and knowledge.

Barriers

- The unease apparently expressed by the Chancellor prior to the release of the Turner Report could have caused problems, especially if subsequently these views had been accepted over those coming out of the debate.

Social and cultural: GM Nation

Enablers

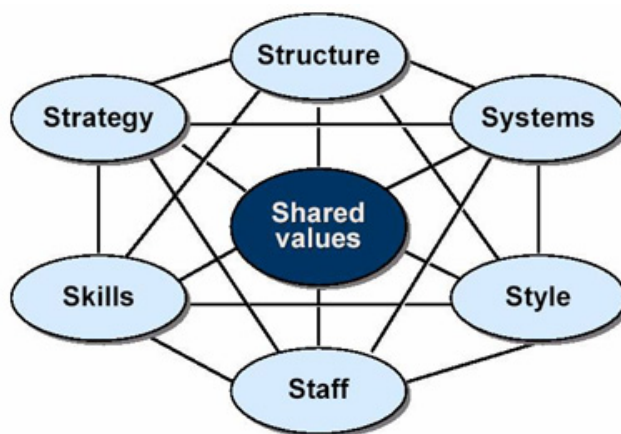
- The overall aim of engaging the public in such a controversial issue and in an imaginative way was applauded and gave the debate every opportunity to fulfil its promise.
- Outcomes of the debate were taken into account in the government's GM policy.
- GM Nation was seen as an innovative and important experiment in public engagement so had an air of excitement about it (however, this also set big expectations).

Barriers

- The debate did not truly educate and inform the public, but ended up sampling views. The lack of results from the economic and scientific studies did not help this.
- The consistent view that the debate had a flawed process created a foundation of mistrust for future engagement on policy, and arguably did not help to clear the controversy over the governance of GM in the UK.
- The Steering Group clearly laid out aims, objectives and success indicators for the process, but did not clearly follow up on these – the feedback loop was not open.

Annex C: Researching Culture Using a Social Psychological Approach

This research has drawn upon the McKinsey 7S model illustrated below⁶⁵ to explore how the different aspects of an organisation contribute to determining its ability to achieve an aim, such as to work effectively with the public. This model highlights seven “dimensions” of institutional change and collaboration. It was developed by McKinsey & Co to help their clients understand and identify the different aspects of their organisation and how these interact with each other to help the organisation achieve its aims. The “dimensions” they classified are both “hard” and “soft”. Hard elements are factors such as the organisational structures and management systems that any institution has in place. Soft elements are factors such as the culture or ethos of an organisation, and the skills and attitudes of employees. McKinsey’s model helps organisations recognise that their effectiveness and resources to achieve their ambitions are dependent on each of these dimensions and how they interact.



Whilst McKinsey use this model to identify different aspects of organisational effectiveness, Involve has applied this analysis structure to looking at the capacity of any organisation, public or private, to achieve its ambitions to work effectively with the public. The “hard” dimensions are often more tangible and easy to identify, most commonly presented through strategy statements, corporate plans, organisational charts and other documentations.

Thus, the commitment of Government to public engagement can be clearly identified in “hard” sources such as the recent Policy Review, in the programmes developed to train civil servants to engage with the public, and in the toolkits designed to help them do so⁶⁶. In contrast, the “soft” factors are more difficult to quantify because they are made up by the relationships and cultures within and

⁶⁵ Department for International Development (2003) *'Promoting Organisational & Institutional Development'*. London: DFID

⁶⁶ See for example: Strategy Unit (2007) and Cabinet Office (2004). *Code of Practice on Consultation*. London: Cabinet Office

between groups of people. They reflect the working culture of an institution as well as wider societal networks of partners, stakeholders and communities⁶⁷. The intangibility of “soft” factors makes them no less powerful as potential barriers or enablers to how an organisation carries out its work. This research starts from the point of view that the institutional culture of the civil service is instrumental in determining how, and with what level of success, public engagement is part of the way in which Government operates; from informing the choice of engagement methods, to determining whether those working in government take the public’s input seriously, and informing their perception of the value of these activities for policymaking.

There is also strong evidence to suggest that such “soft” factors play a key role in the capacity of an organisation to conduct and maintain successful public engagement in policy making. Recent research into attempts to integrate public engagement activities into governance structures at home⁶⁸ and abroad⁶⁹ reflect how organisational culture is now recognised as a central element that underpins the ability of any public engagement initiative to inform policy. As Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker observed in their 2006 paper ‘Locality Matters’, it is not so much delivering the right approach – such as citizens juries or development trusts – that matters, but rather how culturally disposed any given organisation is to empowering others⁷⁰. Furthermore, evidence suggests that in any process of organisational change, it is these softer dimensions that tend to lag behind in implementation and are most likely to threaten success⁷¹.

The model set out above is helpful as a way of identifying the need for a change in “soft” factors such as the culture of the civil service, to match the ambitions set out in “hard” dimensions such as the Policy Review process, to achieve this aim. By exploring the culture of the Civil Service, the research enables a better understanding of the messages, ideas and narratives about the value of public engagement that will resonate with the civil servants charged with determining policy and making recommendations to political representatives.

This project draws its research methodology from the discipline of social psychology. Social psychological approaches to analysing culture focus on how the everyday interactions between individuals and groups contribute to shaping attitudes,

⁶⁷ This work builds on concepts of collaboration and whole-system attitudinal change, see, for example, Waddell, S (2005). *Societal Learning and Change: How Governments, Business and Civil Society are Creating Solutions to Complex Multi-Stakeholder Problems*. Sheffield: Greenleaf Publishing

⁶⁸ Crick, B.R. (2001) *Citizens: Towards a Citizenship Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; Mayo, M and Anastacio, J (1999) *Welfare Models and Approaches to Empowerment: Competing Perspectives from Area Regeneration Programmes in Policy Studies*, vol 20, 1: 5-21; Miliband, D. (2005) *The Politics of Empowerment*, Speech at NLGN Annual Conference, 19 January 2005

⁶⁹ Alsop, R (2005) *Empowerment: if it matters, how do we measure it?*, Conference paper: *The many dimensions of poverty*: Brasilia, Brazil – 29-31 August 2005, p13; Dugan, M.A. (2003) *Empowerment*, in *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Burgess, G and Burgess, H Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado; World Bank (2002) *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*, Washington DC: World Bank p11

⁷⁰ Lowndes, V, Pratchett, L and Stoker, G (2006) *Locality Matters*. London: IPPR

⁷¹ See for example Involve, IPPR, and Ipsos Mori (2006) op.cit; Parker, S. and Heapy, J (2006) *Journey to the Interface*. London: Demos;

identities and ultimately behaviours. When considering the ethos of any organisation it is the combination of these attitudes and behaviours that together create an institutional culture or “common sense”. This in turn informs the working practices of all those who act within the institution.

In particular, this project has drawn on the research paradigm of social representations. Serge Moscovici first outlined social representations theory in the late 1960s, in his analysis of how scientific knowledge is disseminated into the wider public⁷². Moscovici described social representations as:

“The contents of everyday thinking and the stock of ideas and the connections we create as spontaneously as we breathe. They make it possible for us to classify persons and objects, to compare and explain behaviours and to objectify them as parts of our social setting.”

Moscovici 1988, page 214⁷³

The theory of social representations offers this research a structured way of uncovering the shared attitudes and behaviours which create the institutional ethos of Government and so the shared reference points, or “common sense”, that civil servants share. It is important to note this institutional ethos affects all aspects of the work of Government. However, this research paper is primarily focused on how it determines the willingness of civil servants and elected officials to engage with the public, and what they see as the role or value of public engagement in policy making.

Research rooted in a social representations approach to studying institutional culture is distinct from more traditional attitudinal research methods. Traditional attitudinal research tends to focus primarily on reporting back what institutional actors say about a particular topic and how common such attitudes are within an organisation. In contrast, social representations research seeks to look beyond collating stated opinions, to understanding what other factors may help generate these attitudes. Looking at culture in this way helps to situate the outcomes of the research in the “real” world. This is because it seeks to explore the total cultural context in which civil servants operate, rather than trying to artificially separate out attitudes towards public engagement from other aspects of the work done by government. This means that should there be other drivers for the will and capacity of civil servants to engage with the public, which are about the operation of government as a whole, the research process can also uncover these factors.

Moscovici argued that the ideas which form culture or “common sense” is created as individuals draw on their previous knowledge to make sense of the world around them. As individuals and groups come into contact with something that is “unfamiliar”, they seek to “anchor” it by relating it to what they already know. New information is made sense of through either its similarity or difference with a known

⁷² Moscovici, S (1988) *La Machine à faire les dieux*. Paris: Fayard

⁷³ Moscovici, S (1961) *La psychanalyse, son image, son public*. Paris: University Presses of France

category. In this way, things, concepts or information are “objectified” or given an identity that helps people communicate about them. An example of how this process works could be how scientific innovations such as genetically modified foodstuffs are understood. Thus, the unfamiliar concept is first identified as a “foodstuff” so that it can be compared with other such objects. It is then categorised in relation to other types of food in order to distinguish it, perhaps as “designer food” or “super food”. This then helps us to understand how the new object is related to, but different from existing objects.

This process reflects how knowledge is created not in a vacuum but within a social and cultural context. Individuals use their previous knowledge to “anchor” and “objectify” something as they exchange ideas and perceptions about a topic in order to understand it. In the context of this research, this means that the distinctive conditions of the Civil Service provide a forum in which civil servants and political representatives share information, ideas and even a sense of identity, which influences their approach to their work. The common sense this creates about how they should act and the role of the public in policy making, is then not accidental or impartial, but shaped by the experience of working in government itself. Put simply; this means that how those in government talk about public engagement does not just reflect a personal viewpoint. Rather, it is informed by the shared experience and knowledge they all acquire through working within Government.

It is important to highlight that this should not be seen as suggesting that all civil servants will think the same, or that such collected common sense is a “mindset” or “group think”. Rather, social representations research recognises that this shared knowledge creates an underlying framework or backdrop on which those working in Government draw upon. This framework of experience acts as a “stock” or “reference library” of ideas to which civil servants are exposed through their working lives and to which they contribute through interacting with each other in the course of their jobs. As Laszlo describes:

“Social representations do, however, not equate with shared beliefs. They are, rather, common reference points”

Laszlo 1997⁷⁴

Within this framework of common reference points there will be a diversity of views on public engagement, as individuals and departments contribute new knowledge or challenge ideas put forward by others. Returning to the example of food technology, it is clear within modern British society there exist a range of ideas circulating about this topic. For example, some challenge the classification of genetically modified foodstuffs as “food”, seeking to reclassify them as unnatural because of their concerns about technological processes used in their production. Thus, alongside a representation of genetically modified foodstuffs as a technological triumph, there exists a counter representation of “Frankenstein foods”. However, even within this diversity of views it is the shared ideas and themes about

⁷⁴ Lazlo, J (1997) ‘Narrative Organisation of Social Representations’, *Papers on Social Representations (texts sur les representations sociales)* 6(2): 155-172

concepts such as "food", "natural" or "technological", which allow GM foods to be objectified and anchored.

The recognition that there will be differences in interpretation and ideas within any institution is critical. It helps identify how individuals do not think the same things because they share the same culture, but that their cultural context confines the range of opinions they hold. This illustrates how powerful the framework of shared reference points are in any organisation, because it shows that even if they are contested, they are nonetheless influential. Thus, even if individual civil servants have a strong view about a topic that is different to others in their department, their views will be framed by reference to those of their colleagues. So too, social representations research draws attention to what is *not* said and what is not referenced, as the absence of discussion and debate on a topic also influences the institutional ethos of an organisation.

Social representations research methods are designed to help identify the "common reference points" within organisations. For the purposes of this research, this means exploring the shared themes that determine the will or capacity of civil servants to engage with the public. These shared reference points are revealed through the ideas, images and attitudes expressed by civil servants as they explain what they know about a particular topic – in this instance public engagement. Thus, a social representations research approach gives a richer and subtler analysis of how institutional cultures influence the attitudes and working behaviours of individuals. As a research approach it asks not just "what is said" but also "how it is said" as a way of understanding how the knowledge that civil servants have about public engagement activities has developed, and how their attitudes to public engagement are affected by their perception of their professional role. In doing so, it offers a way of identifying the barriers and enablers to public engagement that exist within the culture of Government.

Using a Social Representations approach

As an established methodology, a social representation approach offers practical research tools for exploring how attitudes and cultures develop within institutions. This helps ensure that the outputs of this study are robust and reliable and so provide a strong foundation for the final recommendations of this project. Social representational research has already brought new insights into understanding of subjects as diverse as death, healthcare, mental illness, public attitudes to biotechnology, protest movements, citizenship, childhood and stereotypes and values⁷⁵. These studies have used a range of methods that are both qualitative and quantitative, using them to explore the communicative practices of society through which social representations are manifested. As such they provide a body of work on how best to uncover and analyse representative frameworks. This project has chosen to use qualitative interviews to explore the representations of public engagement that exist within the civil service at both a local and national level.

⁷⁵ For further discussion of this research please refer to Creasy, S "Understanding the Lifeworld of Social Exclusion" University of London 2006: London

The study is intended to provide a “snapshot” of the subject matter. It offers an overview rather than an exhaustive analysis of the institutional culture of Government. As such, it draws on the data gathered in eighteen in-depth interviews conducted over the course of three months between April and June 2007. The participants were selected on the basis of being individuals who worked directly within governance structures themselves, either as employees or elected officials⁷⁶. It is therefore important to note that consultants or advisers who advise government on public engagement activities, or citizens who take part in them, were not included in this study. This is because the focus of the study was on the culture of the Civil Service itself. Interviewees were identified from a number of sources including recommendations by the SDC itself, other civil servants known to *Involve*, or by participants recommending other suitable people to interview. Interviewees were drawn from three different categories across both local and national government so that differences in institutional cultures between local and national government could also be explored. The three categories were:

- Those with direct involvement in public engagement activities; e.g. those in communication or engagement teams.
- Those with a strategic involvement in planning, funding or responding to public engagement activities; e.g. policy officers, heads of department.
- Those who are the target audience for engagement activities; e.g. policy officers, politicians, political advisors.

The interviews conducted were designed to encourage participants to discuss at length their views of the role and value of public engagement to the work of government. Once transcribed, interviews were coded and analysed using computer aided qualitative data analysis software. Each of the interviews was structured in the same way around three key concerns, as described below⁷⁷.

Theme 1: Personal experience of public engagement activities

This section sought to explore the personal experiences of participants of working with the public. This included asking them to define what public engagement meant and its role in their working practices, as well as their reflections on the purpose, effectiveness and outcomes of any engagement activities they had been involved in commissioning, constructing, attending or evaluating.

⁷⁶ Annex E to this report sets out the full details of each interviewee

⁷⁷ Annex D to this report details the full interview schedule.

Sample questions

- Can you give me an example of any public engagement activities that you've been involved in directly?
- What's your sense of what public engagement is, and any processes or any activities that you've been involved with recently, as part of your work, that you would consider to be public engagement?
- Can you start by talking a little bit about your own experience of any public engagement activities within your work?

Theme 2: Perceptions of public engagement activities happening elsewhere in government

This section sought to explore participants' understanding of how engagement activities had been used by other agencies and for what purpose, as well as their perceptions of whether this was successful or not. This discussion included both other Government departments or agencies as well as actors outside of the formal public realm and looked at what participants felt the outcomes and lessons to be learned from these activities were, and how they had discerned the success or otherwise of other departments' or organisations' engagement activities.

Sample questions

- Moving on then from your personal experience, just really your sense of where there has been an engagement process that has really contributed to the policy process and maybe what you consider to be a good example and a bad example.
- And are there any particular organisations or other departments that you think people like the SDC can learn from in terms of public engagement activities?
- What about public engagement elsewhere in government and other local authorities? Are there any particular organisations or institutions that you would consider strong role models when it comes to engaging the public?

Theme 3: Reflections on what role the SDC can play in building capacity for public engagement within the civil service

This section sought to draw on participants' experience of working within governance structures by asking for their views on the barriers to using public engagement within government policy making, the challenges facing civil servants in dealing with the public in the years ahead, and any advice they wanted to offer the Sustainable Development Commission, in particular with regards to using public engagement to tackle climate change.

Sample questions

- What support do you think is needed to learn local and indeed national lessons?
- In terms of the Sustainable Development Commission and its intention to support the use of various public engagement practices within local and national government, what would be your impressions of where the barriers would be to engaging the public, within local government, that they could work on, and what, where do you see them supporting people and what would you like to see them do?
- And do you think there's any kind of support, aside from the whole resources question, that people in local government could be provided with to help them with more effective engagement with the public?

It is important to note that the purpose of this study is to explore how those working in government understand the term public engagement, and how they perceive its role in policy making. As described in the overview to this report and in keeping with the social representations research methodology, the research team did not use a predetermined definition of what public engagement is, but rather asked participations to define the topic themselves. However, just as the participants included in this study share certain reference points and "common sense" definitions that shape their attitudes to public engagement, so the authors come from a particular perspective that influences how the research has been conducted and the report has been written.

Annex D: Engagement and the civil service, interview schedule in full

Attitudes to public engagement

- What does the term 'public engagement' mean to you?
- Do you think public engagement is important? Why/why not
- What do you think are the most important reasons that government engages with the public?
- Are there other benefits of public engagement (aside from those listed above/those affecting government)?
- Can you give an example of a public engagement activity (in government or elsewhere) that you found or thought was particularly effective? Why was it effective?
- Do you distinguish between stakeholder and public engagement? If so:
 - How do you distinguish between them?
 - What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of stakeholder vs. public engagement?
- Do you and your colleagues talk about public engagement? How is public engagement talked about? (E.g. as a positive contribution to policy making, or a barrier/ something that is difficult to do?)

Direct Public Engagement Experiences

- Do you engage with the public in your work, or have you been involved in any public engagement activities in the past? (How often?)
- What are the main reasons you or your team/department engages with the public? What outcomes/outputs are you seeking from public engagement?
- Can you describe the engagement process you used? (Different methods/approaches /providers).
- What do you consider to be indicators of success for public engagement activities? (Numbers/impact/findings, etc)
- What are the main challenges you or your team/department have encountered when engaging with the public?
- What do you consider to be the main barriers to government engaging effectively with the public? (Internal/external barriers)

- What support or guidance do you think would help civil servants seeking to incorporate public engagement into their work?
- What other organisations or departments do you think of as good role models in terms of their public engagement work?

Public Engagement In The Future

- Do you think the role of public engagement in government policy making is changing/needs to change? (Why/why not/how)
- What role (if any) do you think public engagement activities can play in dealing with the policy area of climate change?
- Is there anything else you think we ought to consider when thinking about how to use engagement activities?

Annex E: Interviewees

Interviewee 1

National government
Political

Interviewee 2

National government
Marketing/Communications

Interviewee 3

National government
Marketing/Communications

Interviewee 4

National government
Policy

Interviewee 5

National government
Policy

Interviewee 6

National government
Policy

Interviewee 7

National government
Policy advisor

Interviewee 8

National government
Marketing/Communications

Interviewee 9

National government
Policy

Interviewee 10

National government
Policy

Interviewee 11

Local government
Political

Interviewee 12

Local government
Policy

Interviewee 13

Local government
Policy

Interviewee 14

Local government
Political

Interviewee 15

Local government
Policy

Interviewee 16

Local government
Policy

Interviewee 17

National government

Policy

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Burnham Wind Farm Consultation

www.burnham-on-sea.com/news

CoRWM

www.corwm.org.uk

Countryside Alliance

www.countryside-alliance.org

CRed

www.cred-uk.org

DEFRA Carbon Reduction Commitment

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/business/crc/index

DEFRA Climate Challenge

www.climatechallenge.gov.uk

DEFRA GM

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/gm/index.htm

DfES, 14-19

www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19

DH

www.dh.gov.uk

Drugsfutures

www.drugsfutures.org.uk

DWP, Pensions Reform

www.dwp.gov.uk/pensionsreform

EMF SAGE

www.rkpartnership.co.uk/sage

Engaging the public in policy-making (PSP)

http://www.peoplescienceandpolicy.com/perspectives/engaging_public.php

ePolitix

www.epolitix.com

Fathers for Justice

<http://fathers-4-justice.org>

Financial Times

www.ft.com

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www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real_food

Global Campaign Against Poverty

www.whiteband.org

GM Nation? Homepage

www.gmnation.org.uk

Google

www.google.co.uk

Greenpeace press releases

www.greenpeace.org.uk/media/press-releases

International Association for Public Participation

www.iap2.org

Live Earth

www.liveearth.org

Make Poverty History background and related documents (including press release on media campaign evaluation, manifesto, one year on review and letter to Tony Blair)

www.makepovertyhistory.org

Manchester Evening News

www.manchstereveningnews.co.uk

NASUWT

www.nasuwt.org.uk

NHS Your Health, Your Care, Your Say

www.nhs.uk/yoursay

NUT

www.teachers.org.uk

Partnerships online

<http://www.partnershipsonline.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=main.viewBlogEntry&intMTEntryID=2549>

Pensions Commission (including all reports and the final (Turner) report)

www.pensionscommission.org.uk

People and Participation Online

www.peopleandparticipation.net

Policy hub

<http://www.policyhub.gov.uk>

QCA

www.qca.org.uk

Sciencehorizons

www.sciencehorizons.org.uk

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www.soilassociation.org/gm

The contribution of stakeholder involvement to policy making for sustainable development in National Parks

www.shef.ac.uk/trp/research/ESRCstakeholderinvolvement/

The Environment Council

www.the-environment-council.org.uk

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www.guardian.co.uk

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www.independent.co.uk

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www.observer.co.uk

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www.telegraph.co.uk

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www.timesonline.co.uk

Together We Can

<http://togetherwecan.direct.gov.uk/>

Tools for Sustainable Livelihoods: Policy Analysis

<http://www.livelihoods.org/info/tools/pas-PA01.rtf>

Urban Splash

www.urbansplash.co.uk

Vote OK

www.vote-ok.co.uk

Waltham Forest Guardian

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We're in This Together

<http://together.com>

UK Parliament

www.parliament.uk